



jeevadhara



INDIAN CHURCHES: SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND CHALLENGES TODAY. 3

Edited by
Kuncheria Pathil

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Indian Churches: Self-Understanding and Challenges Today. 3

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Editorial

“Indian Churches: Self-Understanding and Challenges Today” was the main theme *Jeevadhara* took up in its July Number 2003. In that Number we tried to present the rich diversity of the Catholic Churches in India, which consist of three different Individual Churches, the *Syro-Malabar*, *Latin* and *Syro-Malankara* Churches, which are historically, liturgically and administratively different, with their own legitimate autonomy. Within the Latin Church in India, there are many Tribal and Adivasi Churches that have their own specific characteristics and lifestyles. The Syro-Malabar Church’s mission dioceses and territories in Central and North India have their own specific context and problems and consequently certain amount of diversity. However, all the Catholic Churches in India are united in one communion with the same faith and sacraments, under the Roman Pontiff, who is the visible head of the Universal Church and the guardian of unity. We must also note here that all over the world there are altogether twenty-two different Catholic Individual Churches, of which twenty-one are the Eastern Catholic Churches. The Catholic Church is a communion of all these Churches.

In the July Number 2004 we continued this theme of the Self-Understanding and Challenges of the Indian Churches by introducing the identity and the present challenges of six more Indian Churches, which do not have full visible communion with the Roman Catholic Church. They are *Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church*, *Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church*, *Malabar Independent Syrian Church*, *Mar Thoma Church*, *Assyrian Church of the East in India* and *the Church of South India*. Of these six, the first five originally belonged to the ancient St. Thomas Christians of India, later became separated from one another due to various historical, theological and other reasons. The sixth one is the *Church of South India*, which is a United Protestant Church formed in 1947 out of four different Churches. We had also promised in our editorial of July 2004 that we would continue the series by taking up the cases of the main Churches in India and complete it in another Number.

The present Number of *Jeevadhara* fulfills the promise by completing the series, "Indian Churches: Self-Understanding and Challenges Today". Here are five more Churches, *the Church of North India, the Methodist Church, the Pentecostal Churches, the Baptist Churches in the North East, and the Lutheran Churches*. We wanted to include in this series also the *Presbyterian Churches* in India, but for various reasons the article on it could not reach us. We know that it is a serious omission. The Presbyterian Church has its origin from the Reformation. It was John Calvin who founded that Protestant Church in Geneva, Switzerland. From the Swiss Cantons, Calvin's communities gradually spread to other parts of the world. During the Colonial period the Presbyterian missionaries started their mission in the different parts of India and established churches. But most of the Presbyterians in India later joined the Church unions and merged either with the *Church of South India* or with the *Church of North India*. However, there are still some independent Presbyterian Churches in North East India.

We are also aware of the existence of many other Churches or Christian Communities in India. Though the main *Anglican Churches* in India are partners in the United Churches of CSI and CNI, the Anglican communities, established by the CMS missionaries in South India became separated in 1964 and formed a separate Anglican Church. The *Salvation Army*, originated in England, is a world-wide Christian denomination, and they are also in many parts of the country. The *Seventhday Adventist* is another Christian group or sect that came to India from the United States. The *Brethren* is still another Christian group in India, which has its origin in Europe from the early middle ages, and they continue many of the early Christian practices like living in community without any private property, washing the feet at every eucharistic gathering etc. *Mennonites* are still another group in some parts of Andhra and they have their origins at the Reformation and they function in a very similar way as the Baptists. St. Thomas Evangelical Church is a new group separated from the Mar Thoma Church of Kerala in the 1960s. There are also many "Evangelical Churches" that give top priority to Evangelization and on that account they function separately from the main line Protestant Churches. This list of Indian Churches may be still incomplete.

Diversity and diversification is the law of nature and of history. All religious traditions, born in a particular socio-cultural setting with the

original experience of the Founder and his first followers, grow, develop and express itself in ever new interpretations and elaborations of faith, beliefs and practices. If this natural process of growth is suppressed, the religious tradition will soon become static, petrified and gradually die out. Or, reformers who stand for progress and change may opt out and found a new denomination, if not an entirely new religion. Very often, a religion born in a particular place and context, when it crosses its boundaries and encounters new situations, new cultures and new peoples, certain changes in its beliefs, customs and practices are bound to emerge, and it has to undergo a process of transformation or incarnation in the new context. It entails the diversification and branching out of one religious tradition into a number of new possible traditions and systems resulting often in new denominations. Inevitably there will be tensions and conflicts between the old tradition and the new one. The old or original tradition sometimes fails to recognize the same faith in the emerging new traditions with the tragic consequence of condemnation and excommunication of the new, causing subsequent divisions. On the other hand, there should be some limits and boundaries for the legitimate diversity and for maintaining the identity of a religion. All these factors must be taken into consideration for an adequate understanding and explanation of the historical diversities and divisions in Christianity too.

Is there any common ground or basis for these diverse Churches to come together in the ecumenical forum? Apparently yes. All Churches believe in Jesus Christ as God and Savior. All of them give a prime place to the Sacred Scriptures as their norm of belief and life. Almost all the Churches, except the Salvation Army, practice the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. The Churches live by their mission. All the Churches claim that they continue the mission entrusted to them by Christ and they all proclaim the Good News of salvation to all. Almost all Churches have some definite forms and patterns of ministry by which they continue in some way the Apostolic ministry, though many Protestant groups rejected the "Episcopal Ministry". Above all, the Churches must obey the call of their Master for unity among his disciples.

What should be our vision of unity today? Unity shall not be envisaged as a reduction of all the existing types of Churches into one type or to one historical Church whether it be Roman Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant. No one Church can claim to be the only valid type or the only one model. Some ecumenists may argue that all our historical

identities and ecclesial individualities must be abandoned, giving way to a new common identity or one new reunited church, like the "Church of South India" model. This is not mostly acceptable today, as it is an "amalgamation model", which looks at our historical ecclesial identities as obstacles and problems. But it must be pointed out that the existing individual Churches and their identities are our precious heritage which must be maintained and safeguarded although these identities should not be conceived as static and closed. No one historical Church is a finally finished product, but is always in the making by a give-and-take process of growth. All the same it must be kept in mind that all the historical Churches have suffered from some kind of fragmentation due to mutual condemnations and exclusion and due to their isolated existence for a long period. Some Churches have apparently lost some important elements of the original Christian heritage. Hence in the ecumenical movement all the Churches are called to repentance, healing and wholeness. All Churches need change, reform, rediscovery and updating in the context of today.

Our vision of One Reunited Church should be clearly in terms of a "Communion of Churches" or "Fellowship of Churches" where all Churches must recognize each other as equals. This communion shall be grounded in the "common faith and in the communion of the sacraments". Such a communion must be maintained, supported and fostered by a sustaining conciliar relationship among the Churches. All the Churches must be able to sit together as equals in an "Ecumenical Council" which could be a visible sign of our ecclesial communion. Should it not need also an "Ecumenical Papacy", the Petrine ministry of leadership and unity, with necessary reform, acceptable to all the Churches? Whatever are the obstacles and hardships ahead, the vision of an "Ecumenical Church" should be fully alive in us today, as our task and challenge in the third millennium. We hope that these profiles of the different Churches from a positive angle that tried to highlight their identity and the challenges today, will inspire our readers and renew their commitment to the Ecumenical Movement. The first step to ecumenism is to know more about the other Churches with an open mind and to shed our prejudices.

The Church of North India Self-Understanding and Challenges Today

Dhirendra Kumar Sahu*

Introduction

Churches in India have played a significant role in the search for unity. In fact the first call for missionary cooperation went out from this land in the works of William Carey. He called for a conference of Christians of all denominations at Cape Town in 1810, to pool missionary experience on common problems. Several missionary conferences held in India in the 19th century made significant contributions to the discussions at the International Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910. The Ecumenical Movement in the 20th century has directly grown out of this conference. The National Christian Councils in India and other countries and the World Council of Churches were also formed as a result of the vision of its participants. The efforts made by churches in India in the 20th century to achieve visible and organic unity for the Church have caught the imagination of Christians in many lands. These efforts towards unity became more significant and concrete after a meeting of some farsighted church leaders at Tranquebar in 1919. In the Tranquebar Conference on Church Union, held on 1-2 May 1919, the thirty three ministers of the South India United Church (SIUC) and

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the Anglican churches issued a manifesto which was a significant milestone in the history of church union.¹

We believe that the challenge of the present hour in the period of reconstruction after the war, in the gathering together of the nations and the present critical situation in India itself, calls us to mourn our past divisions and turn to our Lord Jesus Christ to seek in him the unity of the body expressed in one visible church. We face together the titanic task of the winning of India for Christ – one fifth of the human race. Yet confronted by such an overwhelming responsibility, we find ourselves rendered weak and relatively impotent by our unhappy divisions – for which we are not responsible, but which had been, as it were, imposed upon us from without; divisions which we did not create, but which we do not desire to perpetuate.²

The climate created at Tranquebar helped the various Congregational and Presbyterian Churches to come together and constitute the United Church of Northern India. The first Assembly of this Church, which met in 1924, sent out an urgent invitation to other churches to seek means of expressing the Church's oneness in Christ. As a result of these developments a Round Table Conference was called at Lucknow in 1929 to discuss the possibility of Church Union with subsequent Round Table Conferences. The formation of the Church of South India in 1947 brought new hope, and finally a stage was reached when it was possible to appoint a 'definite Negotiating Committee', which met in Calcutta in 1951 and drew up the first Plan of Church Union in North India. The Plan was further revised in 1954 and 1957. It was then presented to the negotiating churches to decide whether or not they wished to join the Union on the basis of the Plan. However four churches out of seven failed to get the majorities constitutionally required for entering the Union. The Plan was further revised to clear some of the difficulties encountered by the churches while voting on the Plan. The fourth revised edition of the Plan was published in 1965. While issuing

1 It was a conference of Indian ministers but the presence and influence of the two missionaries, G.S. Eddy and H.A. Popley, who had helped in the drafting of the manifesto, cannot be overlooked. H.A. Popley was the secretary of the Forward Evangelistic Movement of the SIUC and G. Sherwood Eddy was the YMCA secretary, who was visiting India for evangelistic purposes.

2 Bell, G.K.A. *The Document on Christian Unity*. OUP, London, 1929, p.278-79

the latest edition of the Plan the Negotiating Committee passed the following resolution, emphasizing the need for a serious and urgent consideration of the Plan : “Resolved that the Negotiating Committee, in authorising the issue of a 4th Edition of the Plan of Union, believes that the Churches should now take their decisions to unite or not on this basis with the least possible delay. While realising that the time required for constitutional procedure varies in different Churches, the Committee requested the Churches to deal with this as a matter of urgency and to take all measures to awaken this sense of urgency among their people as a whole. Finally, the Committee requested that the decisions of the Churches regarding the Plan be taken and communicated to the Secretary by March 1969 (Minutes of the Negotiating Committee, Pachmarhi, 1965).

The Seven Churches

Several streams of Christian tradition flow in the churches of North India. Some of these originated in Europe and North America, either during or after the period of the Protestant Reformation, and were first channelled to India by missionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries. Others had their sources in the experiences of individuals and groups converted to the Christian faith in North India. Influences have even come from the ancient churches of Kerala. Each stream has contributed in varying measure to the life of each of the seven negotiating churches and will, it was hoped, merge fully in the one new stream of the “Church of North India”.

The theological rediscovery of a vision of a united Church within the ecumenical movement in north India arose from the experience of long years of debate, from the way the theological and non-theological factors functioned during the negotiation, and from the pain of the last minute withdrawal of a major negotiating church, namely the Methodist Church in Southern Asia (now the Methodist Church in India). The vision was realized in the joyful reunion of six major denominations – the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, the United Church of North India (merger of Presbyterian and Congregational), the Methodist Church (British and Australian Conference), the Church of the Brethren, the Church of the Disciples of Christ, and the churches connected with the Council of the Baptist Churches in Northern India – to form the Church of North India (hereafter the CNI).

The Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon represent the distinctive stream of Anglican tradition which at the time of the Reformation sought to retain as much as possible of the ancient catholic faith and order. The Anglican missionary enterprise in North India commenced early in the 19th century with the opening of work by two societies-the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS). These societies were assisted in many cases by the garrison chaplains and by the bishops maintained by the British Government in India. The CIPBC was governed by its General Council (it acquired autonomy by an Act of Parliament in 1927), but retained close ties with the Church of England, as well as with other churches in the Anglican Communion. Within India it had thirteen dioceses, each with a bishop and a diocesan council, and a total membership of approximately 2,80,000.

The Methodist tradition, dating from the conversion of John and Charles Wesley in 1783, is represented by two churches in North India. This tradition has always emphasized the evangelical teachings of salvation by faith, personal holiness and Christian fellowship, and at the same time has remained within the mainstream of Christian faith and order.⁽¹⁾ The Methodist Church (British and Australasian Conferences) is the outgrowth of work begun by British and Australian missionaries in the latter half of the 19th century. It had two districts, one in Bengal and the other in the Lucknow-Banaras area, organized according to the Presbyterian system of church government, with a series of church courts leading up to the Annual conference. The Methodist Church in Southern Asia owes its origin to the work of American Methodist missionaries, the first of whom was William Butler who arrived at Bareilly in 1856. The MCSA was an Episcopal church with four bishops, each of whom presides over the work of several Annual Conferences. It has a total membership of approximately 6,00,000.

The United Church of Northern India was formed in 1924 through the union of Presbyterian and Congregational churches which had come into being as the result of the work of missionary societies from Great Britain, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. With varying modifications and additions, each of these societies represented the Calvinist tradition with its strong emphasis on preaching the Word of God, theological clarity, moral discipline and Christian action in society. The UCNI has inherited a Presbyterian form of church government,

leading from local congregations through church councils and synods to the General Assembly. Nearly half of its 485,000 members lived in Assam.

The Council of the Baptist Churches in Northern India represents several congregations, mostly located on the Gangetic plain and in Orissa with a total membership of 110,000, as well as the large Baptist communities in Assam and Nagaland, which were not involved in the North India Church Union negotiations. The first Baptist church was convinced that baptism by immersion of persons sufficiently mature to profess repentance and faith was the only true form of Christian baptism. The famous William Carey and his associates at Serampore were the earliest Baptist missionaries in India. The Baptist churches have a congregational form of government, each local church being largely responsible for its own worship and ministry, and are by tradition strongly evangelical in faith and outlook.

The Church of the Brethren in India was the outgrowth of work begun in 1895 by missionaries from America. The Church of the Brethren was one of the historic 'peace churches' that have been opposed to war and military service. It originated in Germany, but many of its members fled to America in the 18th century to avoid religious persecution. Within India the Church of the Brethren had congregations mainly in Gujarat and Maharashtra with a total membership of approximately 18,000. They were organized into district, which were represented in Annual Conference. An important annual observance of the Brethren is a Fellowship Gathering at which there is preaching, peacemaking and baptisms, climaxed by a Love Feast, a feature of which is the mutual washing of feet in accordance with Christ's example and commandment.

The Disciples of Christ is the name of a church, which originated in America during the 19th century in protest against the creeds and many of the traditional practices of the Calvinistic churches. Its founders emphasized the need to return to the teachings of primitive Christianity, as contained in the New Testament, and to work for the union of all Christians. The Disciples began work in India in 1882 and their congregations are located today mainly in Madhya Pradesh. The local churches are autonomous but join together in voluntary association for Christian witness and service. Their worship is essentially non-liturgical in form and evangelical in emphasis.

The Emergence of a United Identity

The growth of twentieth century ecumenism is one aspect of the search for Christian identity. Even those who look on ecumenism with suspicion can scarcely fail to acknowledge that it has renewed the vision of the Church. Ecumenism (oikoumene) here refers to the movement which has come into being in this century to overcome the division within the Church and to restore its unity. The general impression might be that once a covenant is signed, uniting churches live happily ever after. However, the fact of coming together often causes tensions to be felt more severely than they are felt in separation. The integration of local worshipping groups may prove more difficult than the unification of confessions, particularly when union is based on the principle of freedom of conscience. The concern in the union is to manifest the universality as well as the particularity of the Church, expressing its identity as the people of God. This concern has occupied an important place in the history of Christianity in India.³

The union of churches in north India marked a transition from denominational identity to a corporate identity. But the question of ecclesial identity is not an isolated phenomenon when considered in a particular historical context like that of India. At any given time the Church as a particular expression of Christianity is the outcome of a historical process of development, and therefore takes differing forms in the course of history. Thus the uniting churches adopted the ideal of organic union as a contemporary expression of the identity of the Church. This means that within the union, each uniting church was required to see its own

3 Visser 'T Hooft, W.A. "The Word 'Ecumenical' – Its History and Use" in Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen, eds. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*. WCC, Geneva, 1986, Vol.1, p. 735. There are seven meanings of the word ecumenical:

- i. pertaining to or representing the whole (inhabited) Earth.
- ii. pertaining to or representing the whole (Roman) Empire
- iii. pertaining to or representing the whole Church.
- iv. that which has universal ecclesiastical validity;
- v. pertaining to the world-wide missionary outreach of the Church;
- vi. pertaining to the relations between and unity of two or more churches (or of Christians of various confessions);
- vii. that quality or attitude which expresses the consciousness of a desire for Christian unity.

identity as being not the whole but a part of a common identity. The strength of this new identity lies in the discovery of the richness of various traditions, along with the way in which groups of people in different regions make their own contribution to the witness and service of the Church.

While the union is a partial victory of north Indian Christianity over the divisions brought by western missions, and no doubt a remarkable achievement, the union has also brought in its wake a series of new problems, the response to which is vital in the search for an Indian Christian identity. The strength of the union lies in its potential for constructing an identity that will witness to the reconciling power of the Gospel. However the united Church has also become the repository of considerable and varied resources. Adherents of diverse persuasions were brought face to face within a single corporate body. The challenge has been to reconcile different convictions, castes, regions and language groups in a unified Church with one structure. Therefore such union is vulnerable to internal power politics.

The great strength and toughness of family, caste and community in India ensure that the individual has an assurance of acceptance by a group. However, becoming a Christian demands some separation from the ties of one's former identity. Generally one's identity is defined in terms of the social group to which one belongs, with its traditions and privileges, and which like all human groups tends to seek its own corporate advancement. Therefore it is natural for any community to be defensive. The Church, however, is called to be a new humanity, which must try to transcend the narrow identities that are opposed to development of a full humanity. It must also be able to see sin within itself and change when change is called for. Not surprisingly, this strategy involves a complex of issues concerning the nature of ecclesial identity, both social and religious.

The achievement of the union of churches is through an intricate network of many different and sometimes seemingly contradictory endeavors. There are different points of conviction and different impulses for union, but the transition was from denominational identity to an ecumenical identity through the relationship of theological and non-theological factors. This has ranged over matters to do with both faith and order within the Church. The questions of faith and order have converged during the discussion but sometimes the questions of order

took priority over faith. It is important to identify their relationship as the uniting partners of the CNI did through a definite plan of union. It is through this web of convictions, opinions and diverse emphases that finally the way was found for union.

The movement for union in north India would never have developed through a mere theological relativism. Enthusiasm for mission and consciousness of being an Indian were two major factors of the church union movement in north India. It is necessary for the CNI to reappropriate that which is intrinsic to its own identity as a *koinonia* in history. However, the CNI self-consciously admits plurality, which implies the rationale for the vision of a Church where discipleship includes the irreducible diversity of human social existence. It would be wrong on the part of the CNI to assume that church unity was an end in itself. The ideal is to be an indigenous fellowship for worship, mission and service. Therefore the Church must be aware of the subtle ways in which the influence of certain factors can change its direction. The CNI has brought together six denominational churches and people of different caste, class, tribe, and language groups forming homogenous as well as heterogeneous congregations. These congregations are scattered over north India in a pluralistic society with a cultural milieu thoroughly permeated by Hinduism. The CNI's conviction is that the Church being the first fruit and instrument of God's election must live in obedience to His call as congregations among communities of diverse religious convictions.

The self-understanding of the CNI is influenced both by inherited Christian traditions and the socio-religious character of Indian society. In the light of these twin dimensions of identity formation, one challenging task is of defining a critical self-awareness of faith for Indian Christians. The object is to inter-relate the sense of identity both as an Indian and as a Christian in the corporate life and thought of a united Church. During the past, there have been several attempts to define the nature of the relation between the two identities in the life and thought of Indian Christians. Theologians have spoken of adoption and adaptation of one or more features of Hindu heritage for use in theological reflection in the form of 'indigenization' or 'contextualization' or 'inculturation' of the Christian faith. These ideas are evidence of how complex and intricate a task it is to describe adequately the dynamic nature of an identity that must be Indian as well as Christian.

The Theology of the Union

Each church union has a particular basis and a rationale which even when they are not clearly spelt out might be implicit in the procedure followed and formulas chosen. For example, J.W. Winterhager gives a comparison of unions in Canada and South India. He sees the two movements as representing two radically different approaches to union. He regards the Canada project as the purest embodiment of the principle of Nathan Soederblom that union should come about through the fulfillment and enrichment of the various traditions. Then he characterizes the South India pattern as also based on dialogue and sacrifice of traditional ways. John Webster Grant however says that one can object that both Canadian and South Indian history have been distorted to provide pure types for easy identification. Instead a fairer way of stating the contrast might be to note that the Canadian union was largely inspired by considerations of life and work, while those who carried on the conversation in South India had to grapple with more difficult problems of faith and order.⁴

While it is difficult to categorize a scheme with a particular type, it is important to note the rationale of formulating a scheme and its own way of dealing with denominational differences.⁵ The general challenge in any scheme of union is to continue efforts to evolve an indigenous and ecumenical church. The danger in the success of any scheme lies in the co-existence of denominational Churches alongside the United Church in the same place which leads to ongoing tension. The two schemes of union in South and North India were almost parallel but the consummation in South India took place earlier than in the North.⁶

4 Grant, J. Webster, *The Canadian Experience of Church Union*, Lutterworth, London, 1967, p34.

5 Grant comments that the size, comprehensiveness and Canadianism were emphasized repeatedly in the discussion leading to the formation of the United Church of Canada on 10th June 1925 despite the refusal of a substantial part of the Presbyterian church to enter it. It was the result of the interaction of a particular view of the mission of the Church with a particular national situation. The Canadian ideal was not to be a melting pot but a mosaic to which all would contribute their distinctive gifts. *The Canadian Experience of Church Union*. Lutterworth, London, 1967, p23-24, p36.

6 The Presbyterians were in the vanguard in the South India Union Movement. They had formed an All India Presbyterian Union in 1900. In 1908, its south

Those who gathered at Tranquebar had stated in their resolution their desire to combine the Congregational, Presbyterian and Episcopal elements in the forming of a united Church.⁷ During the negotiation, the three churches were agreed on matters of Faith and the difficulty was mainly in the sphere of Order. The Anglican churches in South India, who were to withdraw from the Anglican Communion in order to become part of the CSI, were under pressure to postpone any final decision and action until after the "Lambeth Conference" met in 1948, but the inauguration went ahead even so. The Church of South India was constituted on 27th September 1947, by the South India United Church, the South India Province of the Methodist Church and the four dioceses of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon.

The inauguration of the CSI and the achievement of the independence of India in 1947 provided added incentive for the negotiators in the north to move forward. It is difficult today to imagine ourselves in the position of those negotiators who drafted the Plan of union. The issues with which they had to deal were both complex and important. My objective, after the chronological survey of the negotiation in north India, is to interpret the theology of union that led to the formation of the Church of North India.

Indian section joined with the Congregational union to form the South India United Church. With this Church, the Lutherans of the Basel Mission in Malabar joined in 1919.

- 7 Three fundamental principles were noted to have guided the Committee all through its deliberations: 1. The Church after union should be a real spiritual home for all its ministers and members in which each can worship and serve God according to the dictates of his own conscience-. 2. The Church after union must be such that no one entering it should feel that by so doing he had cut himself off from his former Christian fellowship. That fellowship must continue in the resultant Church. 3. The church will be an autonomous body over which no State, Church or Society has any authority, though this Church will try to keep in fellowship with other parts of the Church universal. *Church Union News and Views*, Vol.1, No.1, July, 1930, p13. One important event needs to be noted for reference, that during this period of negotiation, the World Conference on Faith and Order was held in Lausanne in 1927 and the spirit of that conference must have had an effect on the south India movement through the nine delegates. After the meeting of the Joint Committee in February 1929, the report of this committee was issued under the title '*Proposed Scheme of Union*'.

Basis of Union

The attempt to reconcile the divergent western traditions was the first task for the negotiators. It was not an easy one as the very process challenged the concept of denomination and advocated a return to the doctrine of the Church as the whole body of Christians, worshipping and witnessing to One Lord in a particular locality. The 1965 Plan of church union in north India and Pakistan was the basis of the formation of the CNI. The objective was defined in the statement of intention given in the preface of the Plan:

“We are agreed in seeking a united church which will be an integral part of the universal church and yet develop the special and distinctive gifts which God has given to the people of India and Pakistan in the expression of their worship, their faith and their common life.”⁸

An assessment of the fourth plan has been done by W.J. Marshall in his doctoral dissertation. He gives a commentary on the Plan and examines it not as ‘an abstract statement of doctrine but as a programme which has been put into action, an example of obedience to God’s will for unity.’ His study brings the theological insights of the plan of union into focus as a result of his experience of ministry in the Church of Ireland, the CIPBC and subsequently in the CNI. In his summary he notes that:

One dominant insight, which informs the Plan as a whole is the Church’s dependence on God. It is remarkable that such a simple, obvious truth should have such profound and far-reaching consequences. Surely everyone knows that the Church depends completely on God and only exists through His continuous action? But it is precisely this truth, which divisions in the Church tend to obscure.⁹

According to Marshall, the Church’s dependence on God may seem a very obvious truth but it is too often obscured by division between denominations. This insight draws attention to the point that Christians of different denominations are not there merely to justify their own positions and stress the rightness of their own beliefs, but together to

8 *The Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan*, 1965. CLS, Madras, p.IX.

9 Marshall, W.J. *The Church of North India/Pakistan: A theological Assessment of the Plan of Union*. Ph.D. Thesis, Dublin University, 1975; and *Faith and Order in the North India/Pakistan Unity Plan*. ISPCK, Delhi, 1987, p119. The book is part of his Ph.D. Thesis of 1975.

seek from God the full expression of truth. Such a view of truth has far reaching implications for unity. In this perspective the statement of intention of the Plan is not an end in itself but a foretaste of unity that is to be a sign and instrument of God's purpose in the world. The movement for unity is not to have a united church with a mere fusion of denominations but to highlight what is common to the uniting churches and to seek for truth that corrects and reconciles the partial insights.

The negotiators in north India affirmed from the beginning the value of diversity and there was a conscious structural need to respect continuing diversity and avoid homogeneity.

We do not desire that any one Church shall absorb other churches, nor that one tradition shall be imposed upon all; but rather that each Church shall bring the true riches of its inheritance into the united Church to which we look forward. We intend that it shall be a Church which, while holding to the fundamental Faith and Order of the Universal Church, shall assure to its members freedom of opinion in all other matters, and also freedom of action in such varieties of practice as are consistent with the life of the Church as one organic body.¹⁰

The search for consensus implies a search for an ecumenical perspective on ecclesiology. It would have been impossible for the negotiating churches ever to have contemplated union with one another unless they had been satisfied that each party to the union held the essentials of the catholic faith. It was possible to continue the debate, to hold together the different presuppositions and divergences regarding the nature of union only with open recognition of each other in Christ. The historical reasons, which lie behind the schisms in the West had comparatively little interest for many Indians. They were convinced that the Church should be one, but to say that all were concerned to promote any scheme of union would be hardly true. Bishop Waller wrote that they wanted a national expression of Christianity.

After affirming its faith in a triune God, the CNI was allowed to bear divergent convictions within one fellowship. Holding the fundamentals of the faith of the Church universal, the principle was to allow freedom of opinion in all other matters, and freedom of action in such differences of practice as were consistent with the general framework of the Church

10 *The Plan of Church Union, Fourth Revised Edition, 1965 CLS, Madras, p. X*

as one organic body. Therefore in the statement of faith the CNI acknowledged the witness to the Catholic faith as contained in the confessions of faith adopted both at the time of the Reformation and subsequently and formulated by the uniting churches or their parent churches. In particular the CNI accepted as consistent with its own doctrinal standards Declaration of the Constitution of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, the Confession of the Faith of the UCNI, the Doctrinal Standards of the Methodist Church (British Conference), the Baptist Church Covenant of the Council of the Baptist Churches of Northern India and the Declaration of Principle of the Baptist churches.

It is obvious that various traditions went to make up the CNI. A genuine appreciation and admiration for traditions other than one's own and sharing each other's experience is the basis of the agreed statement of faith. The various traditions are not seen as opposed but complementary. A positive approach to the validity of the principle of plurality of doctrine within limits might be in order. What is involved in taking them seriously depends on the meaning of the doctrine. Plurality of doctrines within the CNI mirrors the pluralism of Christianity. To accept plurality of doctrine is not to allow latitude of belief but to hold together the plurality of doctrine through the unity of God. The different convictions in the CNI are not a sign of doctrinal relativism but plurality of interpretation of one story. The presupposition of such a view is that in a reconciled community one doctrine cannot be imposed on others. The unity of the Church is based on the presupposition that the Church is a historical community intended to be one in Christ and the divergence of conviction on certain other matters of faith and practice is something which can only be borne within one fellowship by the exercise of much mutual forbearance and charity. The negotiators wrestled with different issues for a long time the way the issues were discussed and agreement reached. Some important issues, which found place in the debate and on which agreement was finally reached were:

1. The place of the episcopate.
2. Acceptance of the ministry of different churches.
3. The traditions of infant and believer's baptism.

1. The place of the Episcopate

Two of the negotiating churches had an Episcopal form of

government. The Methodist Church in Southern Asia lays stress on the constitutional form of episcopacy, while the Anglican Church also treasures the historic continuity of its bishops with the early Church. Despite this difference, which was a source of considerable strain during the negotiations, an acceptable basis for bringing together the two episcopates was finally evolved. The episcopate of the Church of North India will be both constitutional and historic. It will be constitutional, because its bishops will be appointed and will perform their functions in accordance with the Constitution of the Church. It will be historic, because it will have historic continuity with the early Church. However, the Church of North India will not be committed to any one particular theological interpretation of episcopacy.

The Episcopate was accepted in a constitutional form. The continuity with the historic episcopate was being affirmed but no particular interpretation of the fact of the historic episcopate was thereby implied or should be demanded from any minister or member of the United Church. They were aware of the fact that this was one of the main causes of dispute in the history of Christianity. Some regard episcopacy as being of divine appointment and Episcopal ordination as being an essential guarantee of the sacraments of the church. Others regard episcopacy as a form of church government, which has persisted in the church through the centuries and as such may be called historic.

- (a) The episcopate shall be both constitutional and historic.
- (b) By constitutional is meant that bishops shall be appointed and shall perform their functions in accordance with the constitution of the Church.
- (c) By historic is meant the episcopate, which is in historic continuity with that of the early Church. It is accepted as a means of expressing the continuity of the Church down the ages and its unity all over the earth.
- (d) The Church is not committed to any one particular theological interpretation of episcopacy, nor does it demand the acceptance of such an interpretation from its ministers or members.¹¹

It was often pointed out that in a mission field situation episcopacy was likely to be more suitable than local autonomy. For example the

11 *The Constitution of the CNI*, ISPCK, Delhi, 1987, p24

Baptist churches in India had their local autonomy much modified to the central authority. The united Church accepted the three-fold ministry of Bishop, Presbyter and Deacon but in practice it can be more accurately described as a two-fold ministry of Bishop and Presbyter. The acceptance of episcopacy in practice is not without criticism.

Obviously episcopacy in the CNI was not supposed to be what it is in the Anglican Church and members of the free or non-episcopal churches joining the CNI had neither accepted nor are they supposed to accept everything that goes on with episcopacy or in the name of episcopacy. It is unfortunate, however, that in certain respects some dioceses of the CNI, have become more 'Anglican' than the 'Anglican churches' and in certain dioceses of the CNI, in view of their sheer numerical strength, certain groups are trying, in a subtle manner, to thrust upon others some of their former practices and ideas which are peculiar to Anglicanism.¹²

2. *Acceptance of the ministry of different churches*

The negotiation in North India sought to have a unified ministry from the outset. This was no easy task, particularly because different churches followed different practices in ordaining their ministers, e.g. Episcopal ordination, ordination by the presbytery, and congregational ordination. These ordination rites also reflect differing views regarding the ministry, which are held in the churches. The problem was how to bring about a unified ministry, which would have validity for all the differing traditions coming into the Union. Painstaking negotiations and a spirit of charity have enabled the negotiators to evolve an acceptable basis for the unification of the ministry. This is embodied in the Intention of the Representative Act of the Unification of the Ministry.

The question of the lay diaconate was not overlooked but the uniting churches, having carefully discussed this, found no uniformity of functions in various types of lay workers in different negotiating churches. They accepted the ordained diaconate as it existed in the Anglican Church in India as a step to the ordained ministry, leaving the united church to organize this later as might seem best.

The CSI laid down the principle that church union is effected by churches acknowledging one another as churches in the act of union

12 Adhikari, Prabhudan, "Episcopacy in the CNI", *The North India Churchman*, June, 1979, p2.

with provision for the conscience clause. From the day of union the CSI in its own eyes was one church with a unified ministry. There was pressure to postpone any final decision and action until after Lambeth 1948, but the inauguration of the CSI took place on 27th September 1947. The Lambeth Conference 1948 drew up the recommendations to govern the relation between the Anglican churches and the CSI. It proceeded with the assumption that from the point of view of the Anglican church the ministry of the CSI was not a unified one.

The aim of the unification of the ministry in North India was to make it possible without abandonment of any previous conscientiously held belief. The hope was to have unification by a service of laying on of hands with prayer in which God is asked to give whatever He sees to be needed for the fullness of ministry in the united Church. That was central to the plan. The question was whether any one of the uniting churches can properly lay down the sense in which it understands the rite, either as bestowing Episcopal ordination upon those not previously so ordained or as being in no sense ordination at all.

The real difference was that, unlike the CSI, the rite included the laying on of hands. It led to many interpretations. In the second edition of the book, *The Reunion of the Church* (1960), Bishop Newbigin added a new introduction in which his criticism of the North India Plan was made. He said that the procedure laid down for the unification of the ministry is substantially 'supplemental ordination'. He defined it as the attempt to combine a recognition of an existing ordination with the addition to it of something which also has the character of ordination.

It is true that the phrase 'supplemental ordination' has been abandoned in the proposals now before us. But the substance of them is the same – the attempt to combine a recognition of an existing ordination with the addition to it of something which has also the character of ordination. The Lambeth Conference of 1948 was surely wise in saying that this proposal requires much more thorough theological scrutiny before it can be recommended as the medicine for the healing of the Church. I feel bound to submit that the Conference of 1958 was not wise in deciding, without scrutiny, to advise all concerned to take only that medicine.¹³

13 Newbigin, Lesslie J.E. *The Reunion of the Church*, SCM, London, 1960, p. xxv.

The rite of unification was based on the assumption that God will do what is necessary in the context of church divisions to vindicate that which cannot be justified theologically. The unification was not based on the unanimity of interpretations but unanimity of trust. The factor which made it possible in the meeting of minds was the thought that unification was not to be seen as the victory of either view of the ministry over the other.¹⁴

The negotiators have done their best to find solutions through mutual understanding which could be incorporated in the Plan, so as to maintain the full unity of the Church of North India from the very beginning. They also tried to avoid the over-elaboration of details which could be left to be worked out in the process of growing together. It may however be interesting to note how the outstanding difficulties were overcome in the course of the negotiations.

3. The traditions of infant and believer's baptism

While several of the negotiating churches accept both infant and believer's baptism, some of them recognize only the baptism of believers. This conscientious difference in faith and practice was a serious obstacle on the road to unity. After a long period of patient negotiation however a way was finally found which could satisfy the convictions of all. In the Church of North India both infant baptism and believer's baptism will be accepted as alternative practices. Baptist representatives have stated that their churches will be able to enter the Union, since in the Plan "provision is made for the dedication of infants and the administration of baptism by immersion as the seal of conscious faith and profession of faith is required of those baptized in infancy before admission to membership in full standing in the Church" ("Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Churches").

14 The UCNI recognises that, within one of the Churches with which it seeks union, there are those who find a conscientious barrier to full acceptance of other ministers, unless in some act a commission is given to them by prayer, with Episcopal laying on of hands... the UCNI does not regard such a procedure as a necessary condition for bringing about the unity of the Church, since that unity has already been created by Christ alone in His atoning and reconciling death and risen life. Nevertheless the UCNI has stated its willingness to share in such an act, if it will enable the brethren who do have such conscientious scruples, to recognize more heartily the unity of the Church and its ministry.' "The UCNI Statement on the Unification of the Ministry", *Church Union News and Views*, August, 1957, p. 44.

The question of baptism was an important issue because of the participation of the Baptists in the negotiation. Therefore it was decided to regard as equivalent alternatives for entry into the Church both a pattern where baptism in infancy is followed by later profession of faith and a pattern where believer's baptism follows upon a presentation and blessing in infancy. This involved a mutual recognition of convictions about baptism. The rite of initiation occupied a major point of debate during the period of negotiation. Those shall be the members of the united church who have been baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Declaration of this personal acceptance of God in Christ is made either at the time of baptism when it is believer's baptism or at the time of confirmation when it is infant baptism.

It was recognized that the baptism is incomplete as a rite of initiation unless that baptism is confirmed by a personal declaration of faith. The Christian parents are free to decide whether their children will be dedicated as infants and then receive believer's baptism or be baptized as infants and then declare their personal faith at the time of confirmation. The persons baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, who had openly confessed their faith and been admitted by confirmation or other such services to participate in Holy Communion were accepted as members in full standing. But it was impossible to omit all reference to children or catechumens. Therefore they were specially recognized to be within the Church whose nurture in the Christian way is a special care.

Pastoral problems were inevitable in a united Church where differing practices of administration were allowed, because a person may be troubled by grave scruples about his own baptism. The issue would arise if a person baptized in infancy subsequently wished to receive baptism as a believer. The Plan of 1957 allowed the matter to be referred to the Bishop of the diocese for pastoral advice and direction. If the Church claims to hold the authority to baptize, it needs to be very sure that it is right if it refuses to baptize one who comes with genuine faith.

Baptism is the sign of having died, been buried with Christ and risen with him, which is an expression of faith union. 'Baptism is a sign of cleansing from sin, of engrafting into Christ, of entrance into the covenant of grace, of fellowship with Christ in His Death and Resurrection and of rising to newness of life.'¹⁵ But the debate was on the unrepeatability

of God's gracious act of accepting a child or an adult as a member of the family. The question is whether God's gracious act is so tied to a liturgical act that it could become the ground of unrepeatability of baptism. If so the unrepeatability raised the radical question of the meaning of baptism.

A Uniting Ecclesiology

The Church of North India is a reconciliation of different Protestant traditions into organic union. It went a step further than the CSI in that the union took place not only between Episcopal and non-episcopal churches but the Baptists were also included. The question has been raised whether behind the ecumenical verbiage the pursuit of union was largely pragmatic. Pragmatic considerations could not be ruled out altogether. The Anglican Communion had refused since 1947 to recognize the ministry of the CSI. The problems created by lack of any initial unification of ministry in the CSI made the negotiators in the north determined to seek for unification of ministry from the start. Heavy emphasis on the episcopate to be seen as the instrument for continuity of the Church led to tensions.¹⁵

In the organic union the principle of unity in diversity is defended as an acceptable and even essential characteristic of a united Church. Therefore the question needs to be addressed regarding the interpretation of the principle of unity in diversity, and the deeper issue of the identity of the CNI in relation to former denominational identities. The denominations were the outcome of the church's struggle for renewal. They found growing convergence in their apprehension of the gospel, their expression of worship, and the ordering of church life. But when denominations enter into competition with the movement for church unity this becomes a denial of the missionary perspective, and a stumbling block for the witness of the worshipping community.

The CNI is the consequence of the attainment of selfhood in a nation, but such attainment must involve wrestling with the realities of its task

15 *The Constitution of the CNI*, ISPCK, Delhi, 1987, p16

16 Stewart, William, "The Lambeth Quadrilateral: Bane or Blessing?", *Indian Journal of Theology*, 1959, p. 125. He criticised the 1958 Lambeth Conference for re-issuing verbatim the 1920 formula. He appealed to Anglicans to rethink their quadrilateral in the light of the history of the churches and the Gospel itself.

in a particular geographical context. As discussed earlier, the vast majority of Indians are Hindus and the majority of Christians in India are 'Dalits' and 'Tribals'. The inequalities and discriminatory practices found in Indian society are very much operative in the Church. In such a situation it would be much easier for the Church to cater for one particular type of social background. Perhaps this would save the Church from many painful strains and be helpful in satisfying the particular religious interests of a group. But it would not be able to stand up to proclaim the message that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor.5:19).

Any ecclesiology to be ecumenical cannot but be a uniting ecclesiology because the very essence of the Church is being a community of the people who proclaim themselves to be reconciled to God and to one another, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Reconciliation in the Church means living out together the reconciled life and engaging in the mission of reconciliation in order to draw others into the fellowship of those already reconciled. It is God who reconciled the world to himself in Christ. But the divisions within the Church have impaired that mission of reconciliation. It is therefore important to ask how unity is to be expressed and realized in such a way that it is possible for it to take root in the social and cultural life of humanity.

It is the human tendency to cling to the past and to a structure that makes them insensitive to the Lord's active visitation of His people in judgment and renewal. Institutional blindness could be one important factor in the persistence of divisions among Christians, and therefore has led to continued celebration of the Supper in mutual isolation. The eschatological dimension of worship assists in challenging a community. It contains a polarity of the 'already' and the 'not yet'. The most obvious thing regarding the Supper is that it was instituted during the course of a meal and it has to do with food and drink. Yet its nature as a real meal has hardly been prominent in the popular conception of the Supper. A rethinking of the importance of the Supper in the life of a united Church would bring the different perspectives of ecclesiology to the whole.

Conclusion

To suggest replacing *koinonia* with an individual piety would be the end of the ecumenical movement. Rather the need is for a right understanding of the social identity of Christian *koinonia*. Being with

God is fundamentally interpersonal. Discussing social identity based on the triune God is to focus on the sociality of being within God. As Barth says, human inter-relationship is derived from the relationship which is within God's own being. Human community is thus grounded in the community of God's own being. So the human being created in correspondence with God's own being is not solitary but a being in relation.¹⁷ The identity of the church as a community is shaped by the story. In a world where people feel lost, there is a powerful urge for individuals and groups to reaffirm their distinctiveness, doing this perhaps in racial, national, tribal and local ecclesiastical terms. It is feared that consensus would lead to a disappearance of identities, which would be in danger of being swallowed up in the uniformity.

Christians have always tried to maintain their identity amidst differences of geographical area, language, lifestyle, belief systems, and programmes of action; and Indian Christians are no exception. But it is vital to ask how the CNI as a community incorporating different former ecclesial, caste and language identities, could sustain its own identity without falling into uniformity or chaotic diversity. One fundamental challenge to the CNI is to sustain the multiform identity of Christianity in a coherent way focusing on the corporate nature of the Church as the people of God.

The success of the church union movement is seen in the formation of two united churches: the Church of South India and the Church of North India. The historical continuity of the church's faith and life are embodied in the inherited diversities of ecclesial traditions. In bringing together people from different denominations, castes, languages, cultures into one *koinonia*, the CNI could become the *avant garde* of a new age in the kingdom of God. The CNI is Trans-confessional and committed to manifesting the unity of the Church by gathering Christians together in a given place while not giving up the vision of the universal *koinonia*. It involves a tension by being local and at the same time not losing sight of the wider communion which transcends national and cultural boundaries.

Losing one's specific denominational identity brought fear and reason for opposition to church union. The denominational stories did indeed

17 Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 111/2, T&T Clark, Edinburgh. P220, p324.

play a great role in the formation of the united Church. A plausible explanation of the advent of ecumenism in India includes the mixture of two factors – the theological and non-theological. But ecclesiology is not a static concept. It grows out of a complex interaction of national, cultural and confessional heritages. In the context of the church union movement it was a question of identity and relevance. The issue was not just a change from denominational identity to an ecumenical identity. It was how to respond creatively in forming a new identity and be relevant in the social and religious situation of India.

The identity discussion in ecclesiology is significant and that it needs to be understood constantly afresh if the Church is to be a witnessing community. The development of doctrine in the CNI includes a dialectical relation between the central Christian affirmations and the varying historical contexts in which these affirmations find expression in the statement of faith. The strategy has included compiling a common statement of faith to express the bond of union. This is generated from the early Church's experience that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. This oneness of faith has crystallized in various semi-creedal and local statements of faith. While an ecumenical ecclesiology needs to take this into account, it is affirmed in the thesis that God, the Trinity, is the unifier. The task has been to determine how the one-in-Christ bond operates within the fellowship. This obviously involves the scandal of particularity but this does not imply either any superiority or a narrow view of God. To accept Christian particularity, rooted in specific historical events, is not to exclude the activity of God in other ways. Affirming particularity is to question any practice within the Church as well as society that tries to monopolize the activity of God. Such a questioning has deep roots in the prophetic tradition both in the story of Israel and the Church.

General Secretary

National Council of Churches in India

The Methodist Church in India A Historical Sketch and its Challenges Today

Prabhakar Shadrack*

The Methodist Church: A Brief Historical Survey

The Methodist Church is a Church of Christ in which, “the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments duly administered.” This Church is a great Protestant body, though it did not come directly out of the Reformation but had its origin within the Church of England!¹ The Methodist movement is also known as Wesleyan movement because it is by the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of two brothers – John Wesley and Charles Wesley this movement began. Since then God’s grace has moved and inspired the movement to become a world-wide Church. God’s grace has also empowered the spreading of the movement around the world, including our country, India. God’s grace continues

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1 *The Book of Discipline of The Methodist Church in India*, formerly known as *The Methodist Church in Southern Asia* and *The Methodist Episcopal Church in Southern Asia* (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1982), p. 4.

to move in the history of our Church and in the current affairs of the Church.²

The Beginning of Methodism

The founder of Methodism was John Wesley, a clergyman of the Church of England, as was his father before him. His mother, Susanna Wesley, was a woman of zeal, devotion and strength of character who was perhaps the greatest single human influence in Wesley's life. Nurtured in this devout home, educated at Oxford University, the young John Wesley, like a second Paul, sought in vain for religious satisfaction by the strict observance of the rules of religion and the ordinances of the Church.³ John Wesley experienced personal revival and empowering of the Holy Spirit in his life while attending a prayer meeting in Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738. He learned what Paul had discovered – that it is not by rules and laws, nor by our own efforts at self-perfection, but by faith in God's mercy as it comes to us in Christ, that man may enter upon life and peace.⁴ This experience became the turning point of his life and changed his destiny and also the history of England. This really crucial and climactic occurrence of the strange warming of John Wesley's heart at Aldersgate Street that made Wesley into the apostle of England.⁵

The Gospel, which Wesley thus found for himself he began to proclaim to others. first to companions who sought his counsel, including his brother Charles, then in widening circles that took him throughout the British Isles. His message had a double emphasis, which has remained with Methodism to this day. First, was the Gospel of God's grace, offered to all men and equal to every human need. Second, was the moral ideal, which this Gospel presents to men. The Bible, he declared, knows no salvation, which is not salvation from sin. Methodism meant "Christianity in earnest."⁶ The General Rules which are still found in the

2 *The Triumphs of God's Grace*, Published by the Executive Board of the South India Regional Conference, Methodist Church in India. (1989), p. 5.

3 *The Book of Discipline of The Methodist Church in India*, p. 4.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Skevington Wood, "The Eighteenth Century Methodist Revival Reconsidered," *The Evangelical Quarterly* LIII, no. 3 (July-September 1981): p. 144.

6 *The Book of Discipline of The Methodist Church in India*, p. 4.

Discipline are the directions which Wesley gave to his followers to enable them to test the sincerity of their purpose and to guide them in this life.⁷

Wesley did not plan to found a new Church. In his work he simply followed, like Paul, the clear call of God, first to preach the gospel to the needy who were not being reached by the Established Church and its clergy, second to take care of those who were won to the Christian life. Step by step he was led on until Methodism became a great transforming movement in the life of England.⁸

He gathered his people in groups, in classes and societies. He appointed leaders. He found men who were ready to carry the gospel to the masses, speaking on the streets, in the open fields and in private homes. These men were not ordained ministers but lay preachers, or "local preachers", as they were called. He appointed these men, assigned them to various fields of labour and supervised their work. Once a year he called them together for a conference, just as Methodist preachers meet in their Annual Conference sessions today.

Wesley as an Anglican, deeply influenced by Luther and Reformation, was also engaged in dialogue with both Roman Catholics and Anabaptists and has a genuine tolerance and appreciation for distinctive features of those traditions. Thus, he is seen by some as confusedly eclectic, but by others as admirably dialectical.⁹

The year 1738 marks a real beginning for the Wesleyan movement. Although there is evidence that there existed bands and societies before that time, the show got on the road in the six-year period down to 1744, culminating in the meeting of the British Conference. George Whitefield was the pioneer of the evangelical revival in England and the Moravian contribution to the revival had greatly influenced John Wesley.

Wesley was much impressed with the Moravians' experience with small groups, especially their concept of *collegia pietatis*, seen as *ecclesiola in ecclesia* – that is, the little circle of serious Christians existing within the large Church. These had long existed in the Church of England as religious societies, nothing really new in an Anglicanism

7 *The Book of Discipline of The Methodist Church in India*. Division Thirteen – The General Rules of The Methodist Church in India. Para 191 (Appendix 1).

8 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

9 Harold Wells, "Wesley As Liberationist?" *The Ecumenist: A Journal For Promoting Christian Socialism* XXVI, no. 3 (March-April 1988): p. 42.

tinctured with Puritanism. Wesley as usual adapted what he found, combined features of the Moravians' bands and "choirs" and introduced them in his movement.¹⁰

Profiting from the experience with the Moravians, the Wesleys undertook pastoral oversight of these small groups by providing rules of discipline, worship and conduct, which by 1743 had been fixed as "The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies".¹¹ Later on the entire society was organized into essentially neighborhood groups called "classes". Thus, everyone in a society was also in a class. A class ticket meant membership also in a society and was indeed the only formal evidence. The "Plain Account" explains the evolution of the class system from the original device for raising funds begun in Bristol into the efficient means of spiritual and moral oversight and mutual sharing which became the chief mark of early Methodism. Bands continued, at least in the larger societies; but increasingly, the classes tended to replace them.

As the movement grew it took on more and more the features of a worshipping community. That is, the preaching service brought together the members of the classes for informal worship. On one matter the Wesleys were quite clear: these gatherings to hear preaching were not to be seen as substitutes for the liturgical services of the Church. Sunday worship, morning and evening prayer ought to continue unabated, including especially frequent Communion. There the priestly function was supreme. Among the Methodists, however, the prophetic function of preaching was central. Methodist services consisted of preaching aided by Bible, prayer and hymn singing. Although he regarded highly the Book of Common Prayer, in both substance and form, he was not above revising it to suit the needs of Methodists, nor did it restrain him from lively innovations in worship.

The Methodist Movement had taken form. But it was still within the Established Church and outwardly at least, remained so until John Wesley's death. Although the numbers who thronged to hear the Methodists created problems of discipline, these standards were progressively defined both for people and preachers. The General Rules

10 Fredrick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1989), p. 32.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

became a sort of symbolic goal for all the members of the movement. Acceptance of the General Rules was required of would-be members. Their regular reading before the societies was insisted upon. As the movement developed the regulations were collected and codified in what came to be called the "Large Minutes". In Wesley's lifetime the final form was that of 1789. Here the form of organization was spelled out and the standards of discipline for both people and preachers were defined. These Large Minutes edition of 1780 became the basis for the first Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, published in 1785. Here was to be found that most original definition of the purpose of the revival: "to reform the nation and to spread scriptural holiness over the land".¹² Here were the standards for membership and growth. Here especially were the marks of excellence for the itinerant preachers. The Preachers' duties were stated in the "Twelve Rules of a Helper".

You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work.... And remember! a Methodist Preacher is to mind every point, great and small, in the Methodist discipline! ... Act in all things, not according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel. As such, it is your part to employ your time in the manner which we direct... Above all, if you labor with us in our Lord's vineyard, it is needful that you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for his glory.¹³

No wonder that some Roman Catholics, enthralled at the discipline and devotion of the little army of Wesley's preachers, should have compared this movement to the Society of Jesus and its founder to Ignatius Loyola!

The United Methodist Church

Methodism spread from England to Ireland and then to America between 1766 and 1769. In 1766 Philip Embury, a lay preacher from Ireland, began to preach in the city of New York. In 1769 Wesley sent Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore to America and two years later Francis Asbury, who became the great leader of American Methodism.¹⁴

Methodism was especially adapted to American life. These itinerant preachers served the people under conditions where a settled ministry

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

14 *The Book of Discipline of The Methodist Church in India*, p. 5.

was not feasible. They sought out the scattered homes, followed the tide of migration as it moved west, preached the gospel, organized societies, established "preaching places", and formed these into "circuits". Thus, by the close of the American Revolution the Methodists numbered some fifteen thousand members and eighty preachers.¹⁵

In the beginning Wesley had thought of his fellows not as constituting a Church but simply as forming so many societies. The preachers were not ordained and the members were supposed to receive the Sacraments in the Anglican Church. But the Anglican clergy in America were from England and Methodism to all in intents and purposes had become an independent Church. Wesley responded to appeals for help from America by asking the Bishop of London to ordain some of his preachers. Failing in this, he himself ordained two men and set aside Dr. Thomas Coke, who was a presbyter of the Church of England, to be a superintendent, "to preside over the flock of Christ" in America. Coke was directed to ordain Francis Asbury as a second superintendent.¹⁶

"At the Christmas Conference, which met in Baltimore, December 24, 1784, some sixty preachers, with Dr. Coke and his companions, organized the Methodist Episcopal Church in America."¹⁷

In the history of Methodism two notable divisions occurred. In 1828 a group of earnest and godly persons largely moved by an insistence on lay representation separated and became the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1844 there was another division, the cause being construed by some as the question of slavery, by others as a constitutional issue over the powers of the General Conference versus the episcopacy. After years of negotiation a Plan of Union was agreed upon; and on May 10, 1939, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South and The Methodist Protestant Church united to form The Methodist Church.¹⁸

The Methodist Church in Southern Asia

The Methodist Episcopal Missionary Society was started in 1819 and from 1832 onwards missionaries were sent abroad. Dr. John P. Durbin was the first to think of sending missionaries to India. "The

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

17 *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

General Conference of 1852 gave its approval to launch missionary work in India.”¹⁹

Dr. and Mrs. William Butler were the first Methodist missionaries to India. They came to India in 1856 and began their ministry in Bareilly and Lucknow. There was rapid growth and expansion of the work. Therefore, in 1864 it was organised and known as Indian Mission Conference. It was the first Methodist Conference to be organised in Asia by Bishop Thomson in the little chapel in the school at Husainabad.²⁰

The year 1870 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Methodist Church in India. Because, in this year, William Taylor, the famous evangelist was invited to India to hold special revival meetings through which Methodist congregations were established in the cities of Kanpur, Bombay, Pune, Calcutta, Secunderabad, Madras, Bangalore, Nagpur and other cities. “It was this that changed the course of Methodism in India and led our Church out of its provincial boundaries and made it a national factor.”²¹

The Methodist Church in India

The Methodist Church in India was formerly known as The Methodist Church in Southern Asia (MCSA).

The Methodist Church was engaged in the “Church Union” negotiations in North India from 1928. The agreed plan was placed before the annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Southern Asia by the Central Conference in 1968. The annual Conferences did accept the Church Union plan by more than two thirds majority. However, the special session of the Central Conference of 1970 voted against the plan. The Central Conference of 1976 resolved to consider the status of an affiliated autonomous Methodist Church in India with the United Methodist Church, U.S.A. A draft constitution and a draft plan of the proposal were authorized to be prepared by the Committee on Structure of the Methodism and Church Union (COSMACU) which the Central Conference adopted unanimously at its 29th session held at Bangalore in 1979. The same was ratified by more than two third votes by the

19 *The Triumphs of God's Grace*, Published by the Executive Board of the South India Regional Conference, Methodist Church in India. (1989). p. 5.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

21 *The Book of Discipline of The Methodist Church in India*, p. 11.

subsequent Annual Conferences. The Executive Board (Methodist Church in Southern Asia) made a petition on behalf of the Central Conference to the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, to grant the autonomy. The necessary Enabling Act and authorization was granted by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in April 1980 at its session in Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A. The Central Conference was held on 7th January 1981 at the Women's Christian College, Madras and the Methodist Church in India was inaugurated there.²²

The formal status of the Methodist Church in India in relation to the United Methodist Church is therefore, that of an Affiliated Autonomous Church according to Para 670 of the UMC Book of Discipline, 1976 Edition. Today it is organized under six Episcopal Areas consisting of Twelve Regional Conferences.

The Ecclesiology of the Methodist Church

In the beginning the people called Methodists had no distinctive doctrine of the Church – for the very simple reason that they did not need one. The early Methodists were not a Church and they had no intention of becoming one. They understood themselves to be one among a number of religious societies and revival movements of the eighteenth century dedicated to the salvation of souls and the cultivation of the Christian life in its utter seriousness. The specific terms of membership in these societies had no *ecclesiological* reference (“to be saved from their sins and to flee from the wrath to come”). The overwhelming majority in the United Societies were already nominal members of the Church of England or had at least been baptized therein. John Wesley was a staunch churchman – prepared to be irregular and inconsistent but also to defend his irregularities and inconsistencies on what he took to be *Anglican* principles. Charles Wesley was an actual bigot on the point of conformity. Such ecclesiological notions as the rank-and-file Methodist may have had were strange mixtures of attachment to and alienation from the national Church.²³ This meant that if they had no fully formed or peculiar doctrine of the Church, they did have a peculiar

22 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

23 Thomas C. Oden & Leicester R. Longden, ed., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), pp. 212-213.

problem in and with the Church to which they were related – that is, the Church of England. In its simplest terms, it was the problem of how to be an evangelical order (or society) within a “catholic” (or quasi-catholic) Church, which steadfastly refused to sponsor or even to sanction their order and their enterprise.

Professor Shipley summed up the early Wesleyan conception as a *ministerium extraordinarium* within the *ministerium ordinarium* of the Church of England. It was this notion of being divinely commissioned “extraordinary messengers” that provided the frame for the characteristic organization and program of the original societies. Wesley said “the world is my parish” and he said to his lay assistants: “You have but one business: that of saving souls.” It was this limited but central objective that justified the Methodist ecclesiological irregularities – field preaching, lay preaching, Wesley’s extra-parochial, supra-diocesan pattern of supervision and control, extemporary prayers in worship, et cetera. Moreover, it justified the Methodists’ continuing existence as a religious society within the Church of England, despite the latter’s massive disapproval of them. It was on this principle that Wesley deliberately designed the pattern of Methodist preaching services so that they would be liturgically insufficient, leaving the Methodist people still dependent on the priests of the national Church for the sacraments and the full round of Christian corporate life. Wesley never tired of insisting: “We are not Dissenters; we are not Sectarians; we will not separate!”²⁴

A Renewal and Revival Movement

Methodism began as a revival and renewal movement within the Church of England in the 18th century and its history has been repeatedly marked by the continuing revivals. A strong emphasis on the Worship, Study of Scripture, Spirituality, Holiness and Discipline are the basic foundation.

Wesley swept the dead air with irresistible cleansing ozone. To thousands of men and women his preaching and Gospel revealed a new heaven and a new earth; it brought religion into soul-less lives and reconstituted it as a comforter, an inspiration and a judge. No one was too poor, too humble, too degraded to be born again and share the

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

privilege of divine grace, to serve the one Master, Christ and to attain the blessed fruition of God's peace.²⁵

Wesley knew what the Methodist societies were intended to be and he set himself to make and keep them so, an evangelical order defined by their unique *mission*: "to spread scriptural holiness over these lands." He was convinced that the Methodist societies were the chief human agencies of the Revival – and that this was their importance and justification. They were also his hope of reforming the Church of England – not by overthrowing the establishment or even capturing it – but by their actual performance of the Church's essential mission where this was going generally by default.²⁶

Methodist as a stigma of reproach was first applied to Wesley, Whitefield and their followers and to those who, professing an attachment to our Established Church and disclaiming the name of Dissenters, were not conformists in point of parochial order, but had separate seasons, places and assemblies for Worship. The term has since been extended by many to all persons, whether clergy or laity, who preach or profess the doctrines of the Reformation, as expressed in the Articles and Liturgy of our Church.²⁷ The term "Methodist" was a nickname given to the followers of John Wesley. It eventually became the name of the Church.

A Missionary Movement

Methodism was a missionary movement as much as a revival movement. The Methodism became a world-wide movement within a short period of time due to its missionary work and expansion. Missionaries from England and America were sent all over the world. Whatever else Methodism ever was or has since become its first and most decisive identification was as an enterprise of Christian mission, witness and nurture.²⁸

The eighteenth century revival is properly described as Methodist. Throughout the century the name Methodist was employed indiscriminately to mark out all sympathizers with revival. The name then carried no denominational overtones. It represented a blanket

25 Skevington Wood, "The Eighteenth Century Methodist Revival reconsidered," *The Evangelical Quarterly* LIII, no. 3, p. 130.

26 Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, p. 214.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

28. *Ibid.*

identification of all who were involved with the awakening and who subscribed to evangelical doctrine. Equally the term 'evangelical' had not yet emerged as a party designation within the Church of England but stood as it had done since the Reformation for all who embraced the basic truths of the gospel. Thus, throughout most of the eighteenth century, Methodist and Evangelical were interchangeable titles applicable to all supporters of the revival.

"Significantly, and at every point, Wesley defined the Church as *act*, as mission, as the enterprise of saving and maturing souls in the Christian life. This vision of the Church as mission was to be realized and implemented within the Anglican perspective of the Church as form and institution."²⁹

A Social Reform Movement

The Methodist Movement was also a social process. John Wesley called people to holiness of life and this holiness, he insisted, is "social holiness", the love and service of their fellowmen. As Bernard Semmel says,

The evangelical revival in the eighteenth-century England, led by Wesley and the Methodists, prevented the occurrence in England of the equivalent of the French Revolution. Methodism was a conservative check on working-class agitation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries; this is viewed as a positive achievement by the early Methodists of the Wesleyan connection and a number of conservative historians, while more radical historians see Methodism as an oppressive instrument of social control. Some historians portray Methodism as the creative source of the evolution of the radical reform movements in England. However, Methodism should be seen as an essentially liberal and enlightenment-centered movement.³⁰

M. Douglas Meeks sees John Wesley as a "folk theologian" and strategist for the renewal of the Church and the evangelization of society.³¹

29 Thomas C. Oden & Leicester R. Longden, ed., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, p. 219.

30 Robert D. Hughes, "Wesleyan Roots of Christian Unity," *The Ecumenist: A Journal For Promoting Christian Socialism* XIII, no. 4 (May-June, 1975): p. 49.

31 M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* *Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1985), p. 22.

It is well known that Wesley's doctrine of sanctification emphasized in a way quite different from the Reformed doctrine, observable spiritual and ethical growth in the individual and consequently, the real improvement and humanization of society. Wesley himself and many of his followers, were social protesters, activists and campaigners and saw this as essential to the holy life.³²

Wesley's sermons concentrated on practical doctrines of the day. Likewise he involved himself in the servant role by lending his influence to the abolition of slavery, the sweatshops and child labor and improving the working conditions of miners and the living conditions of the people. He gave books where they were needed or sold them at low cost. Whenever people did not know how to read Wesley taught them to read or trained teachers to teach them to read. He established orphanages, provided homes for unwed mothers, lent money at low interests to needy people, provided medical assistance and established medical clinics. "Wesley welded together the 'evangel' with the 'ethic' – personal piety with social piety – insisting on this kind of ministry for those who were his assistants. His ministry was heralding (*kerygma*), it was witnessing by example and it was servitude (*diakonia*). It was a lifelong ministry of outpoured life in service."³³ David Lowes Watson, a British/American Methodist says,

As in the life and thought of Wesley, theological positions must be honed by the exigencies of practice. This circularity of theory and practice, theology and mission, is what he means by a "praxis" approach to evangelism. According to a Wesleyan view, evangelism or theology that does not bear fruit in changed lifestyles (i.e., sanctification of the individual) and transformed society is a false evangelism and a false theology. That is why, for Wesley the Gospel was the offer of Salvation through the merits of Christ's atonement and a summons to a new life in the power of the Spirit.³⁴

To insist on the necessity of obedient discipleship as an integral part of the evangel was the distinctive dimension of Wesley's evangelistic

32 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

33 Charles W. Carter, General ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1983), p. 613.

34 Harold Wells, "Wesley As Liberationist?" *The Ecumenist: A Journal For Promoting Christian Socialism* XXVI, no. 3 (March-April 1988): p. 43.

outreach and principal reason for the efficacy of early Methodism as a spiritually reforming movement.

Wesley already knew that the promise of the Gospel is the new age of shalom, in which not only personal lives, but also human communities, nations and international systems are changed. The Christian looks for and expects to find more and more, the evidence of God's work – in improved prison conditions, end of slavery, care of the poor, the reduction of poverty and more just economic relations. In short, Wesley and the Methodist tradition have always been very hopeful for this world. The evangelical call is immediately a call to work for the new age, to participate in the growth of the Kingdom of God in the world.³⁵

The Doctrine of the Methodist Church

The doctrinal standards of Methodists are rooted firmly in the sermons and biblical notes of John Wesley and the hymns of Charles Wesley. In British Methodism John Wesley's 44 sermons and *Notes on the New Testament* (1754) constitute an official doctrinal standard for Methodist ministers. Methodism has been known for its doctrinal tolerance, a matter that Wesley emphasized: "in opinions that do not strike at the root of Christianity, we Methodists think and let think."³⁶ Having made the point, however, he went on to make clear the importance of those basic doctrines.

Christian doctrine in Methodism may be considered on three levels.³⁷ At the base are the indispensable beliefs of Catholic Christianity in all ages: the Trinity, the person of Christ and the atonement. Hence, the Apostles Creed is accepted as a suitable if not complete affirmation of faith: the Nicene Creed has received more acceptance among Methodists in England than in America. At the second level are the central emphasis of the Protestant Reformation, which played so large a part in the spiritual journey of the Wesleys. Justification by faith, the centrality of Christ and the authority of the Word of God in Scripture all find strong affirmation. The potential of the Reformation teaching of the priesthood of all believers has found actual expression in the concept of the ministry

35 *Ibid.*

36 Albert Outler, quoting from "The Character of a Methodist", *Works*, VIII, pp. 339-347, in "A Methodist Reply," *Concilium* IV, no. 8, 4/1972 (London: Burns and Oats), p. 84.

37 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Methodism".

inherent in society, class, band and lay preacher. Considerable difference of opinion exists as to the relative influence of the major Reformers.

The third level covers those doctrines most particularly Methodist in emphasis. Although Wesley did not formally specify these, they all pertain to various stages of salvation and thus spring from the atonement. Under girding all is that universal work in all men, prevenient grace – a free gift of God to all men (which they may accept or reject), that makes it possible for them to turn to him. This doctrine Wesley saw as relieving the perennial tension between the sovereign divine initiative and the free response of men, and it was on the basis of this that he attacked predestinarian Calvinism. The work of the Holy Spirit in justification is interpreted through the experience of conversion, which as Wesley learned, must admit the “irreconcilable variability” of the operation of the Spirit. The strong doctrine of original sin which underlines Wesley’s teaching has not always been maintained with vigour. In receiving forgiveness in justification of the Christian may also be assured of it through the witness of the Spirit. As the work of justification brings the gift of faith and trust in God, so the work of sanctification leads onto Christian perfection. This doctrine of perfect love or Christian perfection is the culmination of the plan of salvation which begins with cleansing grace in baptism and continues through the convincing grace that brings to repentance; justifying grace through faith to regeneration; to sanctifying grace, whereby the work of God is perfected in men. All is the work of God, Wesley made perfection relative to that which is possible in a fallen world and to the limitations inherent in earthen vessels. Christian perfection in that sense is always imperfect, in contrast to the absolute perfection of God’s love in Christ. Although this doctrine receded in importance generally in Methodism (which led its proponents to start several schisms), it has never been lost and in the mid-20th century receives renewed attention.

Albert Outler says, John Wesley’s own doctrine of the Church, like the rest of his theology was an interesting amalgam. Its solid, consistent core was hewn from bedrock deposits in the Anglican tradition, laid down by the tradition of anti-Roman English “Catholics” - such as John Jewel and Richard Hooker.³⁸ For example, the decisive motifs of Jewel’s

38 Thomas C. Oden & Leicester R. Longden, ed., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, p. 214.

ecclesiology, as seen principally in his controversy with Thomas Harding, may be summarized under five heads:

- i. The Church's subordination to Scripture
- ii. The Church's unity in Christ and the essentials of doctrine
- iii. The notion that paradigmata for ecclesiology should be drawn from the patristic age
- iv. The Apostolic doctrine
- v. The idea of a *functional* episcopacy (as belonging to the Church's well-being rather than its essence).

Each of these motifs re-echoes in Wesley whenever and wherever he refers to the form of the Church and to its *continuity in historical existence*. The grounds on which Hooker justified and approved continental ordinations are precisely those on which Wesley proved to his own satisfaction that an *exclusively* Episcopal polity was not original or classical Anglicanism.

Wesley's view of the Church as *a community of liturgy and devotion* was framed from such diverse sources as the 'Catholic Nonjurors (Hickes, Kettlewell, Ken, Nelson) and the Puritan masters of devotion (Scougal and Baxter). His ideas about the form and administration of the Church came, not from the Puritans nor Dissenter, but from the so-called *latitudinarians* (Stillfleet, Lord King, Tillotson, et al.). Wesley's vision of an evangelical society serving the Church almost against its will was a creative synthesis of Anthony Horneck's vision of a church reformed by "religious societies," from the Lutheran and Moravian priests, from the fourth-century seekers after the perfection of the Christian life and from the Society of Jesus – about which he had curiously mixed feelings. His sacramental theology was borrowed outright from his father's *Pious Communicant* – from which he took his *Treatise on Baptism* – and from Daniel Brevint's *Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*. The influence of the continental Reformers in this particular area is never more that indirect – and that from the Protestant moderates (Bucer, Peter Martyr, Melancthon) mediated largely through Crammer (Homilies), Jewel, et al. This goes with his generally dim view of Luther, his *implicit* rejection of Calvin's concept of the New Testament model of the Church and his *explicit* rejection of the sectarian ecclesiologies of the Protestant left wing.³⁹

Shortly after the Conference of 1755, Wesley wrote to a fellow evangelical clergyman, Samuel Walker (Sept. 1755), in defense of his evangelical order within the Church of England, “irregularities” and all. His main point with Walker is that these so-called irregularities are, each one, functions of the evangelical mission of Christian witness and discipline – and are not necessarily symptoms of dissents. What he would very much like to negotiate, he says, is “a method ... which conducted with prudence and patience, will reduce the constitution of Methodism to due order and render the Methodists under God more *instrumental to the ends of practical religion*”.⁴⁰

As Outler says, in all these comments – and everywhere else that I know of – we find the essential *notae ecclesiae* (marks of the Church) characterized in a distinctive way. This is what I would call the *classical Methodist* (Wesleyan) *ecclesiology*:

- i. The unity of the Church is based upon the Christian *koinonia* in the Holy Spirit.
- ii. The *holiness* of the Church is grounded in the discipline of grace, which guides and matures the Christian life from its threshold in justifying faith to its plerophery in sanctification.
- iii. The *catholicity* of the Church is defined by the universal outreach of redemption, the essential community of all true believers.
- iv. The *apostolicity* of the Church is gauged by the succession of apostolic doctrine in those who have been faithful to the apostolic witness.⁴¹

In the revision of the “XXXIX Articles of the Church of England” for the Methodists in America, Wesley kept unchanged the article on the Church. Article XIX becoming Article XIII. “The visible Church is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”⁴² Wesley singles out the three things that the article says are essential to a visible Church. “First: Living faith; without which, indeed, there can be no Church at all, neither visible nor invisible. Secondly: Preaching and consequently hearing, the pure word of God, else that faith would languish

40 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

42 Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today*, p. 141.

and die. And, thirdly, a due administration of the sacraments – the ordinary means whereby God increaseth faith.”⁴³

The Doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church, defined in the deed of union, 1932 are as follows:

The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the Apostolic Faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that in the Providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread Scriptural Holiness through the land by the proclamation of the Evangelical Faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its Divinely appointed mission.

The Doctrines of the Evangelical Faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the Divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice.

The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of men but in the exercise of its corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognized.

The Preachers itinerant and lay are examined tested and approved before they are authorized to minister in holy things. For the sake of Church Order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the Ministers of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments.

The Methodist Church recognizes two sacraments namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper as the Divine Appointment and of perpetual obligation of which it is the privilege and duty of Members of The Methodist Church to avail themselves.⁴⁴

The Structure and Organization of the Methodist Church

The constitution, structure and administration of the Methodist Church is outlined in “The Book of Discipline”. This contains the Articles

43 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

44 Henry Carter, *The Methodist Heritage* (New York: Abingdon-Cotesbury Press, 1951), pp. 236-237.

of Religion, Wesley's General Rules, the Ritual and other forms of worship and a large section which deals with the ministry, the various Church organizations, the rules governing the life and work of the Church. This is an important tool to guide and direct the administration and the affairs of the Church.

The Methodist Church believes today, as the Methodism has from the first, that the only infallible proof of a true Church of Christ is its ability to seek and to save the lost, to disseminate the Pentecostal spirit and life, to spread scriptural holiness and to transform all peoples and nations through the gospel of Christ. The sole object of the rules, regulations and usage of the Methodist Church is to aid the Church in fulfilling its divine commission.

Some Challenges For Today

An article in Life Magazine some years ago concluded with the statement "Methodism is long on organization and short on theology". Colin W. Williams says, "if this is just judgment of contemporary Methodism, it means that she has departed from her earliest tradition, for Methodism represented in her origins a revival of theology as well as revival of life and the former was inseparable from the latter."⁴⁵ In the light of this, following are some of the main issues and challenges facing the Methodist Church today.

1. Renewal and Revival of the Church

As history reveals, Methodism began as a revival and renewal movement within the Church of England in the 18th century and its impact on the spiritual, social and moral life of the Church brought transformation in the Church and society. Strong emphasis on worship, study of scriptures, spirituality, holiness and discipline of life became the foundation of Methodism. Today, unfortunately the Church has become more an institution, rather than a worshipping, witnessing and service oriented community of believers, because the focus has shifted to the form and structure of the institution and more attention is given to the rights, privileges and office of the hierarchy and laity. More time and resources are spent on elections, conferences, meetings, travel, etc. In other words, the Church has become more materialistic and

45 Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), p. 5.

worldly than spiritual. Therefore, what began as a renewal and revival movement, itself is in need of revival today.

2. Restructuring and Planning

There is an urgent need for the Methodist Church to restructure its administration and functioning, because the present system is old, outdated, lengthy and complicated. Since the present system is also more democratic, giving lot of importance to the participation of the laity in the administration and ministry of the Church, the privilege is being misused and even manipulated for the benefit of certain groups and individuals rather than fulfilling the ministry of the Church. This has also caused many legal problems and litigations in managing the properties and institutions. Therefore, radical changes and simplification of the structure and procedures, are absolutely essential for the smooth functioning of the system.

Good financial management, new initiatives and long term planning for the future expansion of our institutions and Churches, is another important area, which needs more attention and focus at all levels.

3. Effective and Dynamic Leadership

One of the major concerns and crisis in the Methodist Church today is, Leadership. The character, attitude and the life style of the Methodist hierarchy, particularly the Bishops in the recent years, has reached an all time low causing much embarrassment to the Church. Some of them are better known for their power, authority and wealth rather than their spiritual leadership. They enjoy unlimited privileges and comforts, while many Pastors, especially in the rural Churches do not even receive adequate and regular monthly support to provide for their basic needs. The leaders are engaged more in administrative responsibility of educational institutions, properties and extensive travel and therefore, they have less and less time and interest in providing spiritual leadership. Thus, the persons in key positions in the Methodist Church today, including the Bishops, District Superintendents and Pastors have become primarily managers and not leaders, because they hold positions and responsibilities as chairpersons and managers of educational institutions, hostels, hospitals and other institutions.

Leaders are persons with a vision that they are able to articulate. They can name the needs, desires and hopes of the people. They have a charisma that inspires confidence. In contrast, managers accept the

validity of the institutional *status quo* and give their attention to its maintenance. They write and revise policy manuals; the machinery is oiled and polished. In due course, the institution becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to serve the larger group.⁴⁶

Hence, there is a need for more dynamic and committed leaders, who would give dynamic spiritual leadership and influence by their own life and example and lead the Church forward. The Methodist Church should focus on recruiting, electing and appointing people of integrity and commitment to give leadership to the Church in future.

4. Holistic approach to the Mission and Ministry of the Church

The Methodist Church is not only known for its spiritual emphasis but also for its social concern. The Methodist educational institutions, hostels, hospitals and other social organizations are known for their high academic and moral standard and quality of service. In fact, these institutions were established with a vision and commitment to cater to the needs of those who otherwise could not afford and these institutions have rendered yeoman service to all sections of the community. However, unfortunately, today many of our institutions especially in the rural areas, are either closed down or are in a sorry state, struggling to survive. Those which are doing well in cities, have shifted their focus from the needy to the affluent. The Methodist Church has to remind itself of the vision of its founders, who had as basis for their commitment and service, the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ as outlined in the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4: 18). This is very essential today.

In the present day political, social and religious context in India where there is much opposition and resentment against the Church, the Church can make a strong witness through holistic ministry and Kingdom-of-God-centered approach to mission.

5. Ecumenical Co-operation and Joint ventures

Methodist Church has maintained very good ecumenical relations with other Christian Churches and organisations. Methodist Church has also made significant contribution to the ecumenical movement. However, today there is a greater need and scope for ecumenical

46 William H. Willimon & Robert L. Wilson, *Rekindling the Flame: Strategies for a Vital United Methodist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 58-59.

partnership and co-operation in terms of joint ventures in all areas and aspects of Christian witness and service. There is need for more initiatives and efforts in this area, which will not only strengthen our Christian unity but also Christian witness and service.

6. *Interfaith dialogue and collaboration with people of other faiths*

The Methodist Church affirms in its Discipline that it needs to explore and make concerted efforts to provide sound theological understanding and guidance in regard to the role of the Methodist Church in relation to religious pluralism and dialogue with persons of other faiths. However, in reality and practice not much has happened in this area. The Methodist Church should keep cordial relations with our neighbors and friends but also draw plans and programs to participate with all people to work for peace, justice and matters of national interest and welfare.

Conclusion

The Methodist Church has a rich heritage and a glorious history. There have been times of growth and decline, but God in His grace has sustained and led this Church so far and faithful people of God have made great and sacrificial contributions to the growth and expansion of the Methodist Church through the ages. It is a great privilege and opportunity for all those who have been given a part and responsibility in the life and ministry of the Methodist Church today to do their part as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (I Peter 4:10). **TO GOD BE THE GLORY.**

Pentecostal Churches in India Today

Self-Understanding and Challenges

M. Stephen*

The Pentecostals are usually regarded by the main-line churches as a sect or cult. They hardly accept the contribution of the Pentecostal churches. Though many of the theologians talk loudly about wider ecumenism, they do not want to include the Pentecostals, as they look upon them as sectarians. However, there are gradual changes found in this attitude. World council of churches has accepted the Pentecostal churches and their contributions.

Whatever might be the allegations, the Pentecostals are Christians with some distinctive characteristics. They claim that their teachings are rooted in the Bible. Though all Pentecostals do not hold the same doctrines and practices, they have lot of commonalities. The speaking in tongues is one of the distinctive common element for all Pentecostal denominations. In India we have Indian Pentecostal Church of God, Church of God in India, Assemblies of God, Sharon Fellowship Church, The Pentecost mission, World Missionary Evangelism Church and a wide variety of other Pentecostal denominations.

It is true that the Pentecostal churches have raised a tremendous amount of challenge today. It acts as a corrective and dynamic force in the Christian church. The faith, the practice and the very nature of the Pentecostal churches have a very special relevance and challenge for today.

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I. The Origin of Pentecostal Churches

The attempt here is to provide a brief history of Pentecostal movement. The Pentecostals trace back their origin to the day of Pentecost (Luke. 24:49; Acts.2) The glossolalia (speaking in tongues) is acknowledged by the Pentecostals as the distinctive experience along with the gift of prophecy, miracles (healing, casting demons etc.) and the visions. These phenomenon are also found all through the centuries. Irenaeus (130 -202 A.D.) writes, "we have in the church many brethren who have the prophecy and speaking various kinds of tongues through the spirit"¹. Tertullian (3rd century) also testified that glossolalia was found in the Montanist church which he had joined.² The Pentecostal movement is also understood as an offshoot of the 'Holiness Movement'.

The modern Pentecostal movement began from the Topeka, Kansas city in United States. According to Vinson Synan, "In January 1901, one of Parham's students, an eighteen year old girl named Agnes Ozman, was baptized in the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit gave utterance"³. It is observed that Charles Parham holds the basic teachings of the holiness movement. They are justification by faith, sanctification and the divine healing and the pre-millennial second advent of Jesus Christ. Parham was a former Methodist minister, and he had started a healing home in Topeka where he invited the students to study the scripture. This Bible School had the privilege to witness to the fire of the modern Pentecostal movement. But it took firm root from Azusa street experience (1906) under the leadership of a black named William Joseph Seymour. In India, the Pentecostal revival began in 1905 at Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission in Maharashtra. There were also few pioneers of Pentecostal revival in India. They are A.G. Gar (USA), Christian Schumacher (USA) and Thomas Barrett (Norway). In the state of Kerala also the Pentecostal movement spread like a violent storm and people from different faiths have joined the movement.

Today, Pentecostal movement is being recognized by the world Christian bodies, including the World Council of Churches as a significant movement. It was estimated in 1985 that over ten percent of all the

1. Quoted from Anti-Nicene Fathers Vol.I (Charles Scribners sons, 1998,p.53) In the Pentecostal church: A history and popular survey by Elmer Lewis Moor, New York: Canton Press, 1966. p.6.
2. Ibid., p.7.
3. In the Introduction to the book Azusa Street by Frank Bartleman, New Jersey: Logos International, 1980. p.10.

Christian's in the world were Pentecostal or charismatic. They are fast growing in South Korea and Latin America. Around 15% of Christians in the world are Pentecostal or charismatic.

It is estimated in the year 2000 that the broader category of Pentecostals number about 523 million, of these 65 million are Pentecostals, 175 million are charismatics and 295 million are neo-charismatics. It is estimated that nine million members are added every year to this movement.

II. Pentecostal Churches in the Indian Context

a) The Formation of Pentecostal Churches in Indian Context

The missionary who came to India with the Pentecostal message was A.G. Gar. He came to India in 1907. The names of Thomas Barrett (Norway) and George Berg are to be mentioned here as they too came with the Pentecostal message to India. John Christian Arulappan (Tamil Nadu) came to Kerala with revival message in 1870's. In 1890's V.D. David and L.M. Wordsworth from Tamil Nadu also came with the revival to Kerala. (J. Edwin Orr. *Evangelical Awakening*, New Delhi: Christian Literature Institute 1970 p. 96).

The Pentecostal movement had also as its background the revival movements. In Kerala (India), the lay preachers like Kochu Kunjupadesi and Punchamannil Mammen were the key figures behind the revival. But there was a report about the Pentecost from Pandita Ramabai's Mukti mission (1905). The inmates had the experience of the filling of the Holy spirit, speaking in tongues. Before the 'Topeka revival, there was great awakening in the West in the leadership of Jonathan Edward (18th century). It was reported that the great revival that was spread to different countries had the manifestation of spiritual gifts.

The Pentecostal movement in India emerged as a protest against the nominalism and the beliefs and practices of the traditional Episcopal churches. Their doctrines such as infant baptism, the transubstantiation, praying for the dead, praying to the saints (for Pentecostals, Christ is the only mediator), the immaculate conception of Mary, the infallibility of the Pope and the historical episcopacy are not acceptable to Pentecostals. Higher criticism and liberalism are also questioned by Pentecostals.

b) A Survey of Major Pentecostal Churches

Though several Pentecostal groups or denominations exist, only the history of the major churches are described over here.

i) The Indian Pentecostal church of God

Indian Pentecostal church of God is an indigenous Pentecostal movement started in April 1930. The early name of the church was South India Pentecostal church of God⁴. This was a rift from Robert Cook's Malankara Pentecostal Church. The name was changed as "Indian Pentecostal church of God" after four years, that is in April 1934⁵. The founder of the church was Pastor K.E. Abraham. The early leaders were Pastors. K.C. Cherian, T.G. Oommen, P.T. Varghese, P.M. Samuel. The important leaders include Pastors Paramjyoti, P.M. Philip, T.S. Abraham and K.C. John. Though the church had confronted threat from other churches, it was growing and they could start churches in different places in Kerala and outside Kerala, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and North Indian States.

According to Pr. T. G. Oommen the growth of the church was due to the deep commitment and sacrificial life of the early workers⁶. They have around seven and a half lakhs of members.

ii) The Assemblies of God

It is an organization formed in United States and they are sending missionaries to India. They include Pr. Robert Cook, who left the Assemblies of God and joined the church of God (Full Gospel India), Mary Chapman, Burghes and E.A. Sorbo. They could establish congregations. The early Indian leaders were Pastors A.C. Samuel, C. Manesseh, R. Samuel and C. Kunjummen. It is observed that under the leadership of C. Kunjummen, the Assemblies of God had great progress⁷. The charismatic leadership of Pr. P.D. Johnson also made a great impact for the development of the church. They have a membership of eight lakhs.

iii) The church of God (full Gospel) India

The church of God in India was established by the efforts of Pastor Robert F. Cook, a Pentecostal missionary. In 1913 he came to India as an independent missionary and later became the worker of church of God⁸. He was so active and had founded churches in several places.

4. Oommen, T.G. *Apisium Anpathu Varshathe Sevana-charithravum* (IPC and 50 years of history of service) (Malayalam book), Mallappally. Mallappally Printers, 1979.) P.9.

5. *Ibid.*, p.50.

6. *Ibid.*, P.12.

7. *Ibid.*, P. 15.

8. Samuel Mathew, "The Pentecostal Churches in Kerala and its witness in socio-political life" (un published Thesis), Kottayam, FFRC (for the Senate of Serampore College), 1990. P. 46.

Churches were started in Adoor, Panadalam and Punalur (Kerala). They have around 3 lakhs members. The church of God was split into two in the year 1972 on the administrative issues in line with Syrians and non-Syrians.

iv) Sharon Fellowship Church

The founder of the Sharon Fellowship Church is Pastor P.J. Thomas. As a result of revival meetings in 1952, Pr. P. J. Thomas started a Bible School and later on in 1953 and 1957 two other revival meetings were held. It resulted in the formation of a church. The formation of the church is dated in the year 1953. The present president of the church is Rev. T.G. Koshy.

v) The Pentecostal Mission (TPM)

Since 1984, the main faction of the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission is known as Pentecostal mission. It was founded by Pastor Paul. It was the result of a revival in Ceylon (Srilanka). They are an exclusive group which gives importance to the word, the Charismatic gifts and the Koinonia (fellowship). Their head quarters is in Adayar (Chennai). Their membership is two and a half lakhs.

vi) The independent Pentecostal churches

There are a number of independent Pentecostal churches. Most of these churches are local in nature, as they are formed from spontaneous groups which gathered for worship, learning the word and doing the work of evangelism. Most of them have started as home churches. Some of these groups are not only indigenous, but also homogenous in nature. Most of these churches constitute members from the subaltern groups. The independent churches have a membership of around four lakhs.

III. The Pentecostal Churches and Their Self-Understanding

a) The identity

The understanding about the church is that it is a group of people who are called out for a definite purpose. The purposes are worship, proclamation and service. The Pentecostal churches also do believe that they are called out for worship and proclamation.

The self-understanding of Pentecostal churches differ from the main-line churches or the Episcopal churches. The Pentecostal churches were formed as they had a rift from, or movement from the Episcopal

churches, as they were disillusioned with their worship, rituals, faith experience and mission-understanding.

The Pentecostals constitute around 523 million members all over the world today. They are growing in tremendous pace in Latin America and in Asian countries. There may be around 15-20 lakh Pentecostals in India today. They have their own background and experiences. Among them, at least, two-thirds have come from the dalit background. They are the marginalized ones.

Pentecostal theology is based on the experience of the people. It is also apostolic and Biblical. Pentecostal theology is also Christ-centred. The Pentecostals give utmost importance to the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people. Pentecostalism was a movement in its initial stage, but later became institutionalized (Church). The Spirit of the movement is still found in the Pentecostal community which accommodates people from all sections regardless of caste, colour, race, class or religion.

Those who have the Pentecostal experience are divided into three main groups. The classical Pentecostals have their separate identity (they are not affiliated to any mainline churches), the neo-Pentecostals constitute the members of the traditional/mainline churches, and the Catholic charismatics are the members of the Catholic church who are having Pentecostal experience.

Pentecostal community is a restoration movement as it restores the apostolic elements such as holiness, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and charismatic gifts (prophecy, healing etc). It is a renewal movement as it upholds repentance, brotherhood, love, unity and faithfulness. It is a protest movement as it reclaim the Biblical principles which accepts the inerrancy of the Bible, salvation through Christ, and challenges the historical episcopacy, infant baptism, Mariolatry and papal infallibility. Ideologically, many become members of Pentecostal Community as a protest against indignity or because of problem with doctrines and practices of the community or religion or group they belong to. It is liberative movement since it promotes an open community in which people from any caste, class or religion could join this movement. It is interesting to note that a large number of oppressed groups became the members of the Pentecostal communities in different parts of the world. Large number of socially and racially and economically oppressed groups found identity in the Pentecostal movement. Later the Pentecostal movement was domesticated by the elites and the

dominant, so that the dalits and blacks (in America) found their separate identity and consciousness in the Pentecostal movement as their meaningful participation in leadership was denied and their dignity disregarded. However, the Pentecostal original vision has a Spirit of socialism which would challenge the exploitation, oppression and dehumanization (Acts of the Apostles, chapters 2 and 10)⁹.

Pentecostals today involve in the task of theologizing. They also give attention to the issues such as women, dalit, eco-concerns human rights and religious pluralism.

The Pentecostals claim themselves to be truly apostolic, orthodox and Biblical in their understanding of faith, church and mission. They find their roots in the day of Pentecost when the church was inaugurated.

Their identity is not understood as a dependent identity as they find the identity in the Pentecost. The historical episcopacy is not accepted by the Pentecostal churches as Pentecostals believe that they are the true Christian community in whom God pleases and they claim that they are following the Bible and its instructions more truly and closely.

Holiness is a key word to Pentecostal churches. They do not like to conform to the values of the world but to transform the world. Pentecostals uphold the Bible-Centred, and Christ-centered Christianity. In their proclamations, Christ is always supreme. They are to affirm directly what they believe to be true. It may be interpreted as exclusivism; but Pentecostals are not fascists or fundamentalists as they are pacifists and do not advocate conflict and violence.

They claim as a people having a separate and distinct identity and are having a particular ideology. They have non-Episcopal and non-ritualistic ideology. Worship is spontaneous, non-liturgical and free. They interpret the Bible so as to prove the worship as non-liturgical, but in 'spirit and truth'.

They understand that they are a distinct group who uphold the apostolic ministry as what Jesus had commanded them to do. It includes learning the word, preaching the Gospel, and healing the people (it includes cast outing demons). They think that the primacy of mission, as they read from Jesus' mission/apostolic mission, as preaching. The diaconic aspect of ministry is given importance only recently.

9. M. Stephen. Towards a pentecostal Theology and Ethics. Kottayam: Oikos Publications, 1999. (Preface).

Though the Pentecostal churches are more institutionalized today, they started it as a movement. This nature of movement is kept by some Pentecostal groups even today. It also creates problems sometimes as a movement when it disintegrates into different groups. Pentecostalism is a dynamic and charismatic movement in history.

The word 'repentance' is used in a wider sense by Pentecostals. Returning to God through believing in the atoning death of Christ on the cross means a spiritual and moral transformation. They teach the members of the church and others to keep away from sexual immorality, drinking (alcoholism), drug addiction, stealing and murder. The Pentecostals believe that they give utmost importance to the values laid down by the Bible. Pentecostals stress the sanctity and the indissolubility of marriage.

The Pentecostals do believe that people from any strata of the society can become member of the church. Though there are disparities found, the Pentecostal ideology doesn't support racial, caste or gender prejudices. It also accepts persons from any communities. Many people from the subaltern groups join the church to find their identity and status.

Pentecostal theology and ethics are rooted in holiness. They try to have a 'separated' life. Trying to keep away from the life style of the non-Christian world. Following a simple life style, avoiding the intoxicants and condemning the sexual immorality are integral to Pentecostal theology and ethics. The political dimension of ethics and theology is not much appreciated by the Indian Pentecostals, though it is integrated by the Latin American Pentecostals. The liberative expressions are very much accepted by the Latin American Pentecostals.

The ecumenical understanding is not very much found among the Indian Pentecostals. Traditional Pentecostals have misunderstood the word 'ecumenism'. Because of the doctrinal distinctions and differences in practices, the Pentecostal churches do not like to relate to main-line churches. Pentecostals believe that Episcopal churches are not true to apostolic teaching, especially in their practices (mainly rituals). The African and Latin American Pentecostals are relating themselves to other churches in their ecumenical endeavours. In India also the scene is gradually changing. The theological education provides space for openness and co-operation in relation to Episcopal churches. The attitude of the Episcopal churches to Pentecostal churches are also not welcoming.

The Pentecostal churches usually follow a particular administrative pattern. They have the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and committee members. There is youth organization and women's organization. The local churches have their own administrative set up, regional wise. Power is decentralized in most of the churches. The lay participation in the administrative bodies is entertained. But the participation of the women is minimal. The leadership in the central administrative set up is by election. The ministers are categorized on the basis of Biblical understanding, namely, the apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists.

b) The Doctrinal Development

Pentecostals believe in dynamic, recreative, restoring God. God acts in history. He moves with the people. He is holy, loving and forgiving. He is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient. God is transcendent and imminent. He blesses and heals.

Harvey Cox, the outstanding theologian of the day has observed that Pentecostal theology is a narrative theology as it is formed out of experience of God¹⁰. Pentecostal doctrines have roots in experientialism, restorationism and reactionism.

Jesus Christ is confessed as God. He is the only Saviour. Salvation is only by grace through faith. Pentecostals stress the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and atonement through his sacrifice. Pentecostals believe, according to Walter Hollenweger, that the most perfect revelation of God is Jesus Christ¹¹.

About the scripture, whatever undermines the authority of the word of God or the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is unacceptable to Pentecostals. Hollenweger observes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and its content is infallible divine revelation. It is also the infallible rule of faith and conduct and is superior to conscience and reason and not contrary to reason¹². Traditional Pentecostals believe in Plenary inspiration.

Pentecostals affirm the one and triune God-Father, Son and Holy spirit. Steve Durasoff observes that, "Pentecostals are in the mainstream

10. Harvey Cox. *Tire from Heaven*, New York: Addison-Wesly Publishing Co., 1995 P.71.

11. Walter Hollenweger. *The Pentecostals*, London: SCM Press, 1972.,Pp. 291ff.

12. *Ibid.* p. 291.

of historic Christianity in their belief in the Trinity"¹³. It is important to note that the "Jesus only" movement (Chief proponent was Frank J. Ewert, Pastor of a Pentecostal church in Los Angeles), argues that there was only one personality in the Godhead Jesus Christ. The concept of a trinity was erroneous and the terms, "Father" and "Holy Sprit" were simply titles employed to designate various aspects of Christ¹⁴. This shows that there was diversity among Pentecostalism over certain doctrines. Pentecostalism has no single form of doctrine, but there are several variants of the same doctrine. Most of the Pentecostals are Trinitarians.

One of the major emphasis of Pentecostals is the teaching on the Holy Spirit. The Holy spirit is accepted as a person (not an influence) and he is divine. The work of the Holy spirit in persons is stressed by Pentecostals. The Holy Spirit leads people to Holiness. The miracles, healing, prophecy the speaking in tongues and the gifts of grace are realized as the work of the Holy spirit. According to Durasoff, Pentecostals believe in miracles. They expect the supernatural any time, anywhere¹⁵.

Salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit are closely linked in Pentecostal theology. Holiness was emphasized. Pentecostals give extreme importance to justification and sanctification. Following conversion baptism is administered. After baptism, they tarry for the filling of the Holy Sprit. According to Durasoff, one who receives the baptism of the Holy spirit will become a channel through whom the supernatural gifts of the Holy spirit may be transmitted to help others at their moments of greatest need. He states again that, "Nine of these charismatic gifts are listed in the Apostle Paul's first letter to the churches at Corinth. The word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues"¹⁶.

Baptism is by immersion, and Pentecostals believe in adult baptism (They reject infant baptism). Baptism is by immersion. Baptism is in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It represents the burial of the old life with its vices, and the subsequent resurrection to a new life. The rite of baptism is regarded as the testimony to the church and to the world that the person is a new creature in Christ.

13. Steve Durasoff. *Bright Wind of the Spirit: Pentecostalism today*. New Jersey: Logos International, 1972 p. 79.

14. *Ibid.*, P.80.

15. *Ibid.*, P.1.

16. *Ibid.*, P.5.

Holy Communion holds a very important place in Pentecostal theology. It is the commemoration of Christ's death. Durasoff explains "The bread remains only a symbol of the shed blood-even after they are blessed for the sacred service. Pentecostals do not subscribe to either transubstantiation or consubstantiation. He goes on to say that, "To the Pentecostal, it is a ritual, and it becomes a means of grace only by participation and personal dedication to Christ. The union is strictly a mystical union. Grace comes through personal piety and faith, not by physical point of contact with the symbols of communion"¹⁷.

The Pentecostal understanding of baptism and Holy communion are reactions against the practices and beliefs of the traditional churches. The Pentecostals believe that the understanding of Episcopal churches on Baptism and Eucharist are not biblical. In the case of Holy Communion, Pentecostal theology is closer to the reformed perspective of consubstantiation

Pentecostals believe that sanctification is a continuing process. The second blessing (sanctification) that is stressed by Wesleyans is turned to the baptism of the spirit in the holiness movement. According to Martin Marty, Pentecostal belief centres around the experience of a "Second blessing", a baptism in the Holy spirit which has to be added to the water baptism¹⁸. According to Leonard Lovett, "The classical or the old-line Pentecostal interpretation of the origin of the modern Pentecostal movement emphasizes the linkage of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of glossolalia"¹⁹.

Pentecostal ecclesiology does not emphasize institutionalism. It is originally a movement. It is a community which challenges social evils, the vices in the religious systems and the faith and practice of traditional churches and their theology. Pentecostals affirm their faith in the Bible and the experience of the early church. Pentecostal ecclesiology is incarnational as the worship and the structure are so biblical and contextual. The elements of popular religiosity are critically accommodated by Pentecostalism. According to Steve Durasoff," Pentecostals are Christians, most of whom believe in all the historical doctrines of Christianity. What makes them Pentecostal Christians is

17. Ibid., P.87.

18. Vinson Synan. *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*. New Jersey: Logos International, 1975 p.290.

19. Ibid., P. 129.

their earnest desire to recapture the early practice of the first followers of the Jesus of Nazareth"²⁰.

Traditional Pentecostal eschatology is pre-millennial (expecting the second advent of Christ prior to the establishment of the millennial reign), and pre-tribulationists (expecting the rapture of the church prior to the time of tribulation). As it was found in puritan theology the Pentecostal perception of history has been most influenced by their premillennialist belief that the restoration of Israel to Palestine is a sure sign of the immediate return of Christ²¹. Pentecostal eschatology emphasizes also the new heaven and new earth.

Pentecostal missiology is based on the proclamation that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour (Acts 4:12). Pentecostal missiology is also referred to as the "urgent missiology", as it is very closely linked to the eschatology. Pentecostal missiology is formulated on the conviction of the imminent return of Jesus Christ²². Preaching or sharing the Gospel has more prominence than social involvement in the early times. But this trend is changing. Today social involvement is also understood as part of the mission by Pentecostals.

Pentecostal theology perceives that man was created in the image of God and he had fallen as he violated the command of God. He is prone to damnation, but salvation is available by grace through Jesus Christ. Most of the Pentecostal statements of faith argue that man is totally deprived, but it is questionable whether man is totally out of God's grace.

The angels are to serve God as they are created by God. The demons and Satan are the evil powers who are destined for eternal damnation. Traditional Pentecostal theology affirms that Satan is a trouble maker, and he is behind all the troubles of man.

There is also a Pentecostal perspective on heaven and hell. Heaven is a space where the saints (those who accepted Jesus Christ as saviour and leading a holy life) will go, and hell is meant for the non-believers. Those who do not obtain salvation through Jesus Christ have to reach hell. This does not mean that anybody is destined by God to hell or heaven.

20. Steve Durasoff. *Op. cit.*, P.3.

21. D.J. Wilson, "Eschatology, Pentecostal perspectives on" *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* edited by Stanley M. Burgess and Garry Mc Gee, Michigan: Zonderavan Publishing House, 1988. pp.264-265).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 607

IV. The Challenges

The Pentecostalism challenges the mainline churches to be away from the rigidity in worship and the structure of the church. Churches should be more dynamic as a movement rather than being institutionalized. Some how certain main-line churches, especially the Catholic church, have accepted charismatic elements. The charismatic expressions are to be recognized and restored by all the churches.

The Pentecostalism challenges to give utmost importance to personal transformation even as to give importance to social transformation. These two elements are to be linked. It is also to be noted that Pentecostalism should also realize the significance of structural transformation. The social evils are always challenged by Pentecostal churches.

The Pentecostals are facing challenges from the religious fanatics or religious fundamentalists. The Pentecostal missionaries are attacked and even murdered as they share the significance of the gospel with others. Right to change from one religion or ideology to another is a human right. Anyone has the right to share with others their beliefs, so the presentation of the gospel without any force has to be safeguarded. Church as a community has to witness Christ through words and deeds.

It is sure that the Pentecostal ethics is also a challenge to other churches. The Pentecostalism challenges the Episcopal churches in several ways. The modern Pentecostal movement helped them to renew their worship, church organization and theology. When there was charismatic renewal in the Episcopal churches it was suppressed and those who stood for renewal were ex-communicated. This attitude is continued in some Episcopal churches even today. But gradually Pentecostal elements are accommodated by the Episcopal churches.

The Episcopal churches also entertain the evangelistic preaching, prayer groups and exercising of spiritual gifts today. The gift of tongues, prophecy and healing are accommodated by the Episcopal churches as a result of the influence of the Pentecostal movement.

There is also Pentecostal challenge in the area of worship. Some Episcopal churches adopt spontaneous and free forms (non-liturgical) of worship. This is very much found in the charismatic movement in the Roman Catholic Church. The importance of Pastoral care and the decentralization of power are recognized by the Episcopal churches. The Pentecostal morality also has an impact on them, especially the emphasis on holiness.

1. Pentecostalism advocates for the open church. It entertains the people from all classes, castes and races if they accept Jesus Christ as Lord and believe in or experience the spiritual gifts. The Pentecostal movement affirms the fact that the church is not meant for a particular group or class. It is meant for all including the marginalized. It is interesting to note that the Pentecostal Churches in Kerala have been very keen in giving membership to those who belong to the so called low castes, the Dalits. The Pentecostals did show willingness to accept their dignity to an extent.

2. Pentecostalism does emphasize the human dignity, equality and fraternity. The brotherhood is an important factor among them. Originally they had the feeling of oneness, the caring and the sharing. But it has to be noted that the Dalits are not given adequate representation in the leadership of the Pentecostal churches in Kerala. At the same time, it is important to make mention that Pentecostalism has contributed so much to reduce caste feeling in our society.

3. Pentecostalism promotes free (non-liturgical) and spontaneous worship. The worship is so spontaneous that any one could exercise their gifts and to share their experience as testimony.

The worship services are so lively with singing and praising God, the preaching and the celebration of the Eucharist. There is freedom in the Spirit. The Pentecostal worship is not so ritualistic as in the Episcopal churches. The worship also takes indigenous forms in India. Usually the church members sit on the floor. The vernacular is used in worship. The people could clap and express joy as they shout Hallelujah and praises to God. The worship services are not monotonous or dry, but live and refreshing. The traditional forms of liturgy/prayer books/worship order are not used. The prayers are extemporary.

4. Pentecostalism promotes lay participation. The laymen have an active role in the activities of the church. It does accept the reformed idea of the priesthood of all believers. Though ministers are recognized in the church, there is no much gulf between the ministers and the laymen.

5. The pastoral concern of Pentecostals are well appreciated. They give care to each person. Visiting the sick, praying for the sick and providing counselling and guidance to persons are to be greatly acknowledged. There is a close relationship between the people and the pastor.

6. Pentecostalism promotes women participation. Women have freedom to share their testimony, to preach, to sing and to exercise their spiritual gifts such as the gift of prophecy. Though certain Pentecostal churches ordain their women, it is not a common practice among Pentecostal churches in India. The Pentecostals do accept the equal status between men and women, though some Pentecostals may give more importance to the sub-ordination of women. The Pentecostal women are a great help for the church in the task of evangelization. They are very active in sharing the gospel with others. They are also given opportunity to be trained in Bible Schools.

7. The Pentecostals do exercise the spiritual gifts. The gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues and the healing are very significant. These gifts serve people to guide and to restore them in a holistic way. It is worthy to mention that several acute diseases are healed through the exercise of spiritual gifts such as gift of healing.

8. The Pentecostals are very zealous of spreading the good news. They visit hospitals, distribute tracts and conduct street preaching and organize other evangelistic meetings. The live preaching and the messages from the Bible attracts the people. The Pentecostals are Bible-centered and Christ-centered in their theology. They are enthusiastic to share the message of salvation through Christ to all. The church planting is given foremost importance by the Pentecostals.

The Pentecostals are at present aware of the importance of the service or diakonia. They are now involved in supporting the economically backward people to build houses and assisting the people who are in need. They are also trying to help the people who are affected by natural calamities.

Conclusion

The Pentecostal movement is a fast growing one today. It keeps its distinctive elements in its structure, beliefs and practices. It makes a lot of impact on persons and communities and persons because of its emphasis on holiness, prayer and healing. It could also integrate people from all castes and races without discrimination. The attention given to pastoral care and concern and fellowship is to be highly appreciated. It is a movement, which is a hope for subaltern groups as it provides acceptance and dignity to them.

Baptist Churches of North East India Historical Heritage and Present Challenges

L. M. Narola Imchen

Introduction

It is well known that the hallmark of the Baptist Church is “Adult Baptism by total immersion”. The Church is known to be “Baptist” due to this practice and uncompromising attitude, though the modern ecumenical movement and dialogues have softened this position to some extent. The Baptist Churches generally claim that their origin goes back to the Reformation in the “Anabaptist Movement”. “Anabaptist” means “re-baptizers”. The Anabaptist Movement held the strong view that Infant Baptism is invalid, as the infants have no reasoning and hence cannot make a personal choice for Christ. Hence all those who were baptized as infants must be re-baptized when they become adults. There were several groups and varieties of “Anabaptists” during the period of the Reformation. But most of the Protestant and Catholic groups fought against them and gradually they were eliminated.

Historically speaking, today’s Baptist Churches have their origin from England in the 17th century under the leadership of John Smith and Thomas Helwys, who founded several Baptist Congregations with the principles of Adult Baptism by total immersion, Congregational principles in the administration and government of the communities, and total religious freedom for all vis-à-vis the position of the established Church of England. From England the Baptist Churches were taken to most of

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the English speaking countries during the Colonial period, especially to the United States of America. William Carey (1761 – 1834) was one of the famous Baptist Missionary, who came to Bengal and started the mission in India. In this short article, we limit to the Baptist Churches in the North East India, where the Baptists are the most dominant Churches.

In order to understand the Baptist Churches of North East India, their historical heritage and present challenges, first, a brief description of the North East India seems to be necessary. It will be followed by a brief history of the Baptist missions in the North East. Finally we will look at the present status of Baptist Churches in North East India and the challenges it is facing today.

I. North East India (NEI)

The present NEI comprises eight sister states, namely – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and recently included Sikkim. It is linked with the rest of India through the northern part of West Bengal. The entire area covers 2,54, 993 square Kilometres which, by way of comparison, is 25, 000 square kilometers smaller than the single state of Andhra Pradesh. The ethnic composition of the population is extremely complex. Though it is difficult to determine precise percentages, the great majority of more than twenty million inhabitants of the region are of Mongolian racial stock. They have migrated into the region during the last three or four thousand years, though there is no agreement among the scholars concerning the precise origins of the various groups. No one even knows how many languages are spoken in the area. Other than establishing the point that there is much diversity in origin, culture and history of the many distinct groups inhabiting the Northeast. It is approximately estimated that there are around 50 major language groups, with perhaps as many as 150 minor groups.¹

The NEI has a unique cultural situation. S.T. Das, speaking of the region says:

With its diverse population, speaking different languages and professing divergent faiths, it may be regarded as an epitome of India. It is the land where waves of immigrants from Tibeto Burman and Mongoloid stock have met and woven with aboriginals a pattern of common condition and tradition. The people of hills and the plains

1 F.S.Downs, History of Christianity in India, Vol.V, Part 5: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Bangalore: CHAI, 1992, 1-2.

have lived long side-by-side and follow common pursuits of life undisturbed.²

This statement affirms that the different tribes and racial origins have lived together as people of NEI for ages. Hence, in spite of their difference in ethnic origins and the plurality of cultural backgrounds, a certain degree of homogeneity or commonality exists in NEI. In this sense, this is not only a geographical region, but there is something of a social group to be referred to as NEI and this is especially true of the tribal communities as a whole.

There is a large concentration of tribal population in this region. There are indeed about 130 distinct tribal communities in this region and the majority of them inhabit in the hill areas. Their languages and dialects total almost the same number because each tribe generally speaks its own language and dialect. Thus, their religions, customs, practices differ from region to region and tribe to tribe, but they have something in common. As Renthly Keitzar points it, "In spite of the plurality of cultures there exists something that is distinctively tribal: they have something in common which distinguish them from other tribals in other parts of India."³

The socio-cultural life of the tribal people of NEI is corporate and it is in consonance with the integrated totality of their social life. A unique feature about tribal life is the democratic basis of their social and administrative organization. This ideal is exercised in the village, the centre of their socio-political life, under well-represented assembly of clans and age groups. An interesting aspect of the social life of the Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya may be mentioned here. They represent a typical matrilineal society, where the children take the clan name of the mother. In terms of inheritance also, the daughters, normally the youngest inherit the property.⁴ All other tribes are patriarchal. Hence, inheritance and all other socio-political rights are patrilineal and patricentric.

II. History of Baptist Mission in the North East India

Though earlier, some Baptist groups had tried to open some mission fields in the North East, the substantial mission was established only by

2 S.T.Das, *Tribal Life of North East India*, Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1986, vi.

3 Renthly Keitzar, "Tribal Cultural Ethos and Christianity in North East India". *ETC Journal*, Vol.1. Jan-May, 1988, No.2.48.

4 *Ibid.*, 53-54.

the American Baptist Mission. Hence, when we refer to the Baptist Mission in North East India, it is understood that it means the American Baptist Mission. Torbet, the Baptist historian, calls the years from 1833 to 1837 "a notable period in the history of American Baptist Mission". The reason he gives is the increasing enthusiasm for missionary work. Their involvement in such work began to move beyond the borders of Burma to other parts of Asia, including neighbouring India.⁵ Assam was considered as an important area in relation to their strategy for entering China across its inland borders. American Baptists were first invited to take up work in Assam by a British officer in connection with an experimental tea garden project. Several factors contributed to this invitation.

Mission to the Shans : Sadiya and Jaipur

C.A. Bruce, the British official in charge of experimental tea plantations in Upper Assam, and his wife became interested in the tribal people living in the surrounding area – specifically the Khamtis and Singpos. They believed them to be closely related to the Shans of Burma whom, they believed, would provide the gateway to China. Mrs. Bruce had opened a school for their children and claimed that four or five had been converted. In 1834, Bruce persuaded the Commissioner, Captain Francis Jenkins, to invite the American Baptist Missionaries to Assam. This invitation, endorsed with personal letters of encouragement from the company officer Charles Trevelyan in Calcutta and William Pearce of the British Missionary Society, was sent to the American Baptist missionaries working in Burma. This invitation put forward a number of arguments in favour of the project, but the most persuasive was the assurance that Sadiya would make an excellent centre for work among all the Shan peoples that inhabited central Asia including China. The invitation was thus accepted favourably. At this point the primary interest of the American Baptist Mission was not NEI itself.⁶

Accordingly, the Board designated Nathan Brown and Oliver T. Cutter, a printer, to the new field that was designated "Mission to the Shans". Thus, the two missionary couples – Nathan and Eliza Brown and Oliver and Harriet Cutter – after a tedious journey from Calcutta of four months arrived at Sadiya on 23 March 1836.⁷ They took up residence

5 Torbet, *Venture*, p. 51.

6 F.S. Downs, *The Mighty Works of God: A Brief History of the Council of Baptist Churches in NEI. The Mission Period 1836-1950*, Gauhati: CLC, 1971, pp.16-17. Hereafter referred to as Downs, *Mighty Works*.

7 Torbet, *Venture*, pp. 55-56.

a short distance away from the British garrison and began their work. But unfortunately, right from the beginning they met with disappointments. They soon discovered that the Singphos and Khamtis did not speak nor understand the Shan language, which they had learned with much difficulty. They also discovered that Sadiya and surrounding places was sparsely populated. The missionaries began their work by learning a new language – Assamese – that was understood by all the people living near Sadiya. Eliza Brown and Harriet Cutter started a small school with around twenty students. As for the men, Cutter became involved in establishing village schools, and Brown occupied himself with literary work in addition to preaching. When the press went into operation, Cutter became actively involved in that work.⁸

The second disappointment for the missionaries, as we have noted, was the discovery that there was no large a population in the region as they had been led to believe, and only a few of the Singphos who lived some distance away were even remotely related to the Shans of Northern Burma and Thailand. They immediately requested reinforcements for work among the Singphos. Accordingly, the Home Board designated two new missionary couples for this work. They were Jacob and Sarah Thomas, and Miles and Ruth Bronson. On April 1837, they reached Calcutta. They were advised to wait until after the monsoons, but they ignored the advice and set out for Sadiya as soon as arrangements could be made. Jacob Thomas was never to begin the work he had come for. For he was killed by a falling tree, while traveling on a boat to get medical assistance for Miles Bronson who had fallen ill.⁹

During this period, political developments in the area caused unrest and instability for the missionaries. Moreover, the Khamtis' attempt to reclaim Sadiya from the British by force resulted in extensive military expeditions that drove the population to the interior hills. As a result the area became depopulated and Sadiya station had to be abandoned. All the missionaries had to move to Jaipur.¹⁰

From Jaipur Bronson made the exploratory tours into the hills that brought him into contact with the "Nocte Nagas of Namsang village or Namsangheha Nagas", living in what is today Arunachal Pradesh. The

8 Frederick S. Downs, "The Establishment of the American Baptist Assam Mission," *ICHR*, VI.1. (June 1972), pp.71-78. Hereafter referred to as Downs, *Establishment*.

9 *Ibid.*, pp.71-72.

10 Downs, *Establishment*, p.73.

inhabitants were unfriendly and any white man was suspected as a spy for the British. In spite of such initial discouragements, rigorous language study and other plans for mission work were underway and reinforcements sent for. In 1840, the next group of missionaries arrived in Assam. They were Cyrus and Jane Barker and Rhoda Bronson, the unmarried sister of Miles Bronson. She was the first single woman missionary to arrive in Assam. Once more the little group of American Baptist in Assam met with disappointments. Within eight months of their arrival Rhoda Bronson died of fever.¹¹ In addition to this loss, the Barkers, who were designated to help Bronson in the Naga Mission, became convinced that their mission was "to the Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley". Though it is clear that Brown and Cutter influenced him in the change of mind, he was the first to ask for official permission to undertake that work.

At this turn of events all the missionaries with the exception of Bronson were convinced that it was not possible to continue with the missions' original objectives. They decided for "the less ambitious but more realistic work of serving the peoples of the Brahmaputra valley" because the number of people that could be reached by the small number of missionaries through the Assamese language was large. They felt it would be much easier to reach them in the plains with better facilities for travel provided by the many navigable rivers. Moreover, the political situation in the plains was more stable and medical facilities were also readily available in the Government centres.¹²

Assam Mission

F. S. Downs comments that, "if the death of Rhoda Bronson in December, 1840, marked the end of the Shan mission, the baptism of a young Assamese name Nidhiram at Jaipur in June, 1841, marked the beginning of the Assamese mission."¹³ Thus, the Shan Mission was supplanted by the Assam Mission. Nidhiram or Nidhi Levi¹⁴ who as a boy studied at the school run by Eliza Brown and Harriet Cutter and later helped in the printing office converted.¹⁵ However, his conversion

11 Gunn, *Far Country*, p.50.

12. *Ibid.*, p.76.

13. *Ibid.*, p.77.

14 He was formally renamed Levi Farwell at the time of his baptism. The practice of giving converts whose names were thought to be unsuitable was adopted for a period of about 15 years at the beginning of the mission work in NEI. Levi Farwell was the name of an American Baptist pastor from Boston who was a strong supporter of the missionary cause.

15 Gunn, *Far Country*, pp. 53-54.

had little impact on the Assamese Hindus. There were no further baptisms among the Assamese until 1845, though there were several converts from members of other communities. In fact, there never was a large response from the Assamese.

For several reasons, the next twenty years or so were years of trials and hardships for the American Baptist missionaries in Assam. Illness and death had reduced the number of missionaries but even then reinforcement was slow in coming. However, by 1843 the missionaries were able to establish three mission stations, namely Jaipur, Sibsagor and Nagaon¹⁶ with four missionary families and a handful of national assistants.¹⁷

Some of the major occupations of the pioneer missionaries included survey tours, preaching (sometimes preaching included scientific lectures - Mr. Danforth referred to giving such a lecture on electricity),¹⁸ literary activities of translating the scripture, textbooks, and establishing schools. In all these, the wives of missionaries had their share. The missionaries had come into contact with the hills tribal peoples who frequented the plains for trade. As a matter of fact, the Karbis, the Kacharis and the Nagas had been noted with interest as early as 1855. But actual work for the tribals could be started only much later.¹⁹

The pioneer missionaries in Assam had by now established themselves at three stations - Sibsagor, Nagaon and Guwahati. Jaipur had been abandoned with the giving up of the Shan Mission. For the next twenty years or so, these three stations were to remain the main centres of the American Baptists in Assam.

Mission among the Hill Tribes

At the suggestion of Bronson, Cyrus Tolman and his wife Mary Bronson Tolman, who was the daughter of Bronson, were appointed to work among the Karbis (then called Mikirs). They were the first missionaries sent to work among the hills people since 1840. Unfortunately ill health compelled them to leave in the following year. In 1864, serious work began for the Garos though contacts and converts had been made prior to this, and a mission centre for the Garo work was established in 1867.

16 Then known as Nowgong.

17 "Annual Report - Asiatic Missions," *BMM*, 23:6, June 1843, p. 159.

18 "Letter from Mrs. Danforth," *BMM*, 35:9, Sept. 1885, p. 386.

19 "Forty First Annual Report: Mission to Assam," *BMM*, July 1885, p. 313.

Thus, beginning with the Garos during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the American Baptist Mission began what was, in the twentieth century, to become a very successful work among the hill's tribals living in the present states of Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur. During the nineteenth century itself, among the Garos the numerical increase was significant.

Mission to the Garos

For the beginnings of the Garo mission, we must go many years back. E. G. Phillips comments:²⁰ "In every work for the blessing of mankind, we know that providence prepares and leads the way, but it is not always that we can trace his stepping so clearly as in this work." On the significance of the Garo Mission, Downs says that, "The first real break-through as far as conversions are concerned, in the history of the mission, came with the beginning of work among the Garos in the 1860's".²¹ It is interesting to note that this work was really begun by the Garos themselves, and not by the missionaries.

For generations, the Garos had been regarded with dread by their plains-neighbours, and were a source of constant trouble for the British government. In 1867 the chief commissioner of the province referred to them as "blood-thirsty savages", "most desperate and incorrigible", and expressed hope that the work of the missionaries might meet with success.

In 1847, the Government hoping to gain some influence and control over the tribe started a school in Goalpara for Garo boys. Ten boys were brought into this school, two of whom afterwards became the first two Garo converts and leaders of the young Garo church. Seven of the ten became Christians and active leaders of the churches.²² No historical account of the Garo work could be complete, without a special reference to these two first converts, Omed and Ramkhe. Both were eager to learn and to enter the school at Goalpara from the beginning.

In comparison with the previous history of the mission work on the plains, the growth of Christianity among the Garos was phenomenal.

20 E.G.Phillips. "Historical Sketch of the Garo Field," in *The Assam Mission of the ABMU*, Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference. Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886. p.54. Hereafter referred to as Phillips, Jubilee.

21 Frederick S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. V, Part 5 : North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Bangalore, 1992. p.78. Hereafter referred to as, Downs, *NEI*.

22 Phillips, *Jubilee*, p. 54.

Within a year communicant membership increased to 150, and within seven years to 400. Missionaries were appointed to work among the Garos with the centre first at Goalpara and then, from 1877, at Tura, the newly established Government headquarters in the hills. The Tura station soon became the largest in the American Baptist Assam Mission, in terms of the number of missionaries stationed there and the size of the Christian community associated with it. In 1875, the Garo churches were organized into an Association, which had its first meeting in Goalpara.²³

Mission to the Naga Tribes

As mentioned earlier, another area in which American Baptist began work during the early period that showed little promise at the time, but which was later to become a major centre of the Christian movement was in the Naga Hills. After the abandonment of the Namsang mission in 1841, the missionaries had contact with Nagas from time to time. In fact as early as 1847, a Naga named Hubi had been baptised at Sibsagor. His tribe is not indicated, probably because at that time the missionaries were not well informed concerning tribal differences.

Godhula Brown and E. W. Clark were responsible for the real beginnings of Christian work among the Nagas. Clark arrived at Sibsagor in 1869 to work among the Assamese. He was in charge of the mission and the press at Sibsagor and became involved in the beginnings of the work among the tea garden workers. But during his tenure of three years, he became interested in the Ao Nagas, who frequented the Sibsagor Bazar. To his surprise, an Assamese evangelist, Godhula, was found willing to imperil his life to preach to the Nagas whom the Assamese generally disliked.²⁴

Godhula visited the Ao hills in 1871. After a period of residence in Haimong village, Godhula converted nine young men whom he brought to Sibsagor for baptism in 1872. Later Clark accompanied Godhula back to the village and fifteen more were baptised. In 1876 Clark himself moved to the hills, living first at Molungyimjen (then known as Haimong) and then to the newly formed village of Molungyimsen. Molung, which remained the centre of the mission operations in Nagaland until almost the end of the century. In fact, the Ao area was not yet administered when Clark went there against the advice of government officials. Several

23 *Ibid.*, pp.79-80.

24 Milton S. Sangma, *History of the American Baptist Mission in North East India, Vol-One*, Delhi, 1987, p. 221. Hereafter referred to as Milton. *History*.

churches were established in nearby villages. Despite the promising beginnings at Molung the early Christian community fell on bad times and was only starting to recover at the end of the century.²⁵ Very soon the mission extended to the Angami Nagas, the Lotha Nagas and gradually to all the other Naga tribes in Nagaland.

Mission to Manipur Tribes

Attempts have been made by the Burma missionaries as early as 1836 to enter Manipur, but permission was refused. In 1885, Robert Arthington of Leeds, England wrote to the Assam Baptist Mission stating his desire to open work among the Singphos, with a station at Mankum or Ledo in Upper Assam. But this scheme did not materialize at that time.

In 1890, the year in which Surchandra Singh was compelled to abdicate the throne in Manipur, a young English missionary named William Pettigrew arrived in Bengal under the sponsorship of the private society run by Robert Arthington, the Arthington Aborigine Mission. Pettigrew was a member of the Church of England but became a Baptist through the influence of R. Wright Hay, a "Baptist Missionary Society" missionary stationed at Dacca. But he continued to work under the Arthington Mission. Then he began to take interest in the Meitheis of Manipur, some of whom he met in Cachar. In 1894 he applied for permission to enter Manipur and work among the Manipur boys and wrote a primer and grammar. He carried on his work for six months, after which the British authorities, who were then administering the state on behalf of the minor raja, decided against continuing mission work in Imphal. However, Pettigrew was permitted at his own risk, to work among the tribal peoples in the hills. After looking at several places in 1895 he decided to establish a mission centre at Ukhrul, in the hills mainly inhabited by Tangkhul Nagas northeast of Imphal. But the Arthington mission refused to support his mission work any longer. Therefore, Pettigrew decided to join the American Baptist Mission. Accordingly he placed his case before the American Baptist Missionary Triennial Conference held at Sibsagar in December 1895.²⁶ The Triennial Conference and the executive committee at Boston in January 1896, decided to take over the work in Manipur which had been commenced by Pettigrew and

25 Downs, *NEI*, pp. 82-83.

26 V.H. Sword, *Baptists in Assam*, p.116. Also cf. Downs, *Mighty Works*, pp. 75-78.

accepted him as a member of the Sibsagar Baptist church and named him the first missionary to Manipur.

He proceeded to Manipur and began his work at Ukhrul on February 1, 1896, which he had previously chosen. In 1901, a church was built at Ukhrul, and during August and September, frequent church meetings were held. On September 19, twelve persons were baptized at Ukhrul. On February 23, 1902, three more were baptised and the church in Ukhrul was formed. This was the first Baptist Church in Manipur and the only one till 1916.²⁷ The membership consisted of both Nagas and Kukis.

This is how the American Baptist Mission made its beginning in NEI from 1836 up to the end of the nineteenth century. For the first twenty years or so there was frequent talk about closing the Mission because it was unfruitful. Only after the successful beginnings of the work among the Garos that an element of stability was introduced. Though not much headway was made in terms of numbers in Nagaland and Manipur by the end of the century, the Garo churches were growing rapidly, a large mission centre was prospering in Tura, and all were optimistic about the future in the other hill areas. Even in the plains the second half of the century saw notable growth among the tea garden labourers, tribal people from Chota Nagpur that had been brought into the region to serve the rapidly expanding tea industry. In the context of what was clearly going to be a permanent work, the Home Board began to send more missionaries. In 1862 the American Baptist Missionary Union resolved that the field be re-enforced as speedily as possible.²⁸ By the end of the century about 123 American Baptist Missionaries, men and women had served in the NEI.

III. Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI): Present Situation, Issues and Challenges

In 1950, the associations related to the American Baptist Assam Mission joined a newly formed organization called the Council of Baptist Churches in Assam. The establishment of this organization – now known as the CBCNEI, since 1959 – is one of the most important events in the history of the Churches belonging to it. The creation of the CBCNEI marks the end of the Mission era and the beginning of the Church era.

27 Milton S Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India, Volume-One*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 274-75.

28 Forty Eight Annual Meeting, *BMM*, 42:7, July 1862, p. 211.

A study of the developments leading up to the establishment of the CBCNEI reveals the extent to which that organization was not really something new. It was not the creation of a new fellowship. It was simply a reorganization of a historical fellowship that has existed from the beginning.²⁹

According to the 52nd Report of General Secretary, CBCNEI, there are 86 Associations, 5,894 Churches and 8,74,050 members under CBCNEI at present.

The following are the ongoing programmes of CBCNEI

Theological Education Programmes

The following Theological Colleges under CBCNEI are carrying on the Theological Programs in the region:

- Eastern Theological College, Jorhat: This is the only sponsored college of the Council
- Baptist Theological College, Pfutsero
- Clark Theological College, Aolijen
- Trinity Theological College, Dimapur
- Manipur Theological College

Medical Ministry

The following hospitals are doing the medical ministry under the CBCNEI

- Jorhat Christian Medical Centre, Jorhat
- Tura Christian Hospital
- Kangpokpi Christian Hospital
- Satibari Christian Hospital
- Impur Christian Hospital

Student's Ministry

There are three Hostels under the CBCNEI, which are contributing much towards student's ministry: Tyrannus Hall, Shillong, Lewis Memorial Hostel, Guwahati and White Memorial Hostel, Guwahati.

Other Programmes

The Council also conducts several other programmes for the NEI, such as, Sunday School Teachers Training, CBCNEI, Youth Leaders'

29 Downs, *Mighty Works*, 184-85.

Conference, Mission Leaders Seminar, Manipur Baptist Convention, Peace Conference, CBCNEI Computer Center, Guwahati Street Children Project, Baptist Leaders Meeting, Worship Conference, Ecumenical Consultation on Nation Building

Concluding Remarks

Though Christianity was introduced in NEI in the early part of the 19th century, the progress was rather slow. This was mainly due to the hostile attitude of many people towards the missionaries. In many areas, the heads/leaders persecuted those who became Christians. But the activities of the missionaries were not merely confined to conversion. They engaged in developmental projects of medical care and education and by the beginning of the 20th century the fruit of this involvement became apparent. It opened the doors for the people of NEI to think in a global context and brought them into the context of the world family.

The impact of Christianity in NEI has been viewed with two extreme reactions. Some writers, mainly anthropologists, have condemned the missionaries for destroying NE culture and the glory of the “noble savage”. On the other hand, missionaries have tended to glorify the importance of Christianity without objective analysis. Often scholars have oversimplified the matter and have dwelt on the theme that the tribals of NEI were headhunters but transformed by conversion into spiritual headhunting. We may come to the conclusion that there is some truth in both the views.

It is true that the early missionaries have done wonderful work, but at the same time, we cannot also deny the fact that the American missionaries were the first who forbade taking part in traditional dances, singing traditional songs and participation in other indigenous customs and culture. Once these were forbidden, something beautiful about the early stage of human civilization died out forever. As Visier Sanyu rightly comments, “this attitude not only undermines the priceless values of culture but also resulted in total chaos and confusion for some generations”³⁰. The converts who experienced something new in their lives became overzealous and often went a step further by trying to clothe themselves in the lifestyle and culture of the missionaries. In this, we can say that some of the missionaries failed to see the serious

30 Visier Sanyu, “The Nagas in the 1st half of the 20th century”, 148, in Alongla P.Aier, ed. *From Darkness to Light: In Commemoration of 125 years of Christianity in Nagaland*, Nagaland: NBCC, 104.

consequences, the destruction of culture resulting in social and moral crises in years to come. As a result, NEI went through intense social cultural and ethical crises in its history.

However, in spite of some of these negative effects, Christianity did make such a deep impression in NEI that by 1920's most tribes had a Christian community. These early Christians were a shining example for setting up new trends especially in the field of education. The children of the first converts often became educated, famous and successful. Christianity was thus seen by fellow animists as a vehicle to power and success. This factor led many to convert to Christianity. The question of whether many were truly converted will remain debatable. But it is an undeniable fact that Christianity was the beginning of many great things in the history of many of the tribes in NEI.

Today, many Christians in NEI are struggling to rediscover and maintain their identity, but at the same time not losing their Christian identity. How to go about with this complex process is the issue before many Christians. Another issue confronting the Christians is the role of women in the Church. As far as the society is concerned, women seem to have no problem. As long as they are qualified – women are able and allowed to perform any role in the society, except in the political arena. But when it comes to the Church, many Churches still have reservations to give equal participation to women. As we enter the 21st century, how long the churches are going to restrain women from playing their rightful roles?

Another great challenge facing the Baptist Churches of NEI today is the issue of HIV/AIDS. The CBCNEI is trying its best to conduct awareness programmes, and various seminars relating to HIV/AIDS and Christian responsibility.

There is yet another issue the churches are still grappling with, and that is the whole issue of the Ecumenical Movement. To be very honest, there are many Christians and churches that still feel most comfortable only with the members of the same denomination. In fact there are many who feel and think that their own denomination is the only right one and others are all at fault. How to address this whole issue of ecumenism is a great challenge for the Church today in North East India.

Lutherans in India

Its Mission History and Challenges Today

D. Samuel Jesupatham*

Introduction

Lutheran Church cannot be introduced without a special mention of its founder Martin Luther (1483-1546), who was the most important leader among the Reformers. Luther was an Augustinian monk and a scholar of Sacred Scriptures. All his theology had its origin from his own personal experience of "righteousness". "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1 : 17). He realized that human salvation or justification is totally a free gift of God, and not something to be achieved or merited by doing a chain of spiritual exercises or by recourse to sacraments or rituals or cult. Based on this spiritual and theological insight, he challenged the medieval practices of the Catholic Church and published his "95 Theses", and that was the beginning of the Reformation in Europe.

Luther had to break way from the Catholic Church and he founded his own communities in Germany with the principles of *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *sola scriptura*, the practice of only two sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, rejection of Episcopal system and Papacy. In the beginning these communities were known as "Evangelicals" and later as "Lutherans". Gradually Lutherans spread out in many countries of Europe, especially the Scandinavian countries, and during the Colonial period in America, Asia and Africa.

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Lutheran Missions in India

Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Henrich Pluetschau came to the Coromandel coast, East Indies on the 9th July, 1706. They came on the instructions of King Frederick IV of Denmark, to propagate the Gospel in the Danish territory in Malabar. South India was known as Malabar. Tamilians were Malabarians. These earliest protestant missionaries carried the gospel on their shoulders in its letter and spirit. The famous professor at the Halle University Hermann Francke was guiding the missionaries in doctrine and in the way that the light of the gospel should be scattered in the colony.

The historians especially the church historians are happy to narrate the landing of the missionaries in India with the gospel as something to do with the extension of the empire of the West. It is a reflection of a history turned into an academia. The endeavour is called the Tranquebar Mission. The Mission specified itself as a great venture to be inscribed into the history of South India and to that extent to India itself. The missionaries are proudly owned by South Indians as the first Indologists, who were honest in their reporting to the West.

The Bible in India first ever translated and printed was at Tranquebar. The bringing out the Word of God in print was a leap in the cultural sphere, from palm leaf to fabric of paper which was produced in the foundry initiated by the missionaries specially for the purpose. Innumerable tracts were produced and were used for the purpose of their work. The tracks were not for mass distribution, they were used as teaching material and also for the furtherance of the doctrine. The doctrine was most important in the Tranquebar Mission. Catechism and the Biblical truth were coupled to make possible for the new believers and natives to get introduced to the Word of God.

The missionaries started schools and boarding houses for the natives. There was special home for girls. The first ever tailoring unit was introduced by the missionaries. The Mission had great need for resources. It engaged itself in many directions, namely street preaching, translating Tamil original material into European languages, translating the biblical doctrines into Tamil, building Churches, creating a new dictionary and syntax for the Tamil language and more importantly nurturing the new Christians. Moreover, hymns and liturgy of the period of piety was introduced and developed in worship services.

The central commitment of the Mission was to 'exterminate heathenism' from among the people who live outside the light of the Gospel, and instill in them the gospel 'knowledge of man's deep depravity and of Jesus Christ who rescues men'. The Tranquebar Mission has left indelible track in history of how a Christian Mission handled itself in a foreign land where it landed to make known the Gospel. The natives according to Tranquebar Mission were a people involved in their own morality and ethics. Though generally these were part of the larger community, missionaries looked beyond the mindset of the natives where a complete hierarchy of gods, better known as the *Pantheon* was worshipped. The missionary records and their reports are a treasure for understanding the early Church in India and particularly the current debates of Mission and Social Analysis itself.

The Lutheran Mission studied the phenomenon of caste and formed its position. Some missionaries wanted to totally eradicate caste, as it is totally against the Christian doctrine of creation and the equality of all humans. Others wanted to make a compromise and wanted to tolerate it, at least, for the time-being in order to promote conversions until the native congregations attain to the full growth of a *national Church*.

The Lutheran Churches in India are:

- 1) Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC)
- 2) Arcot Lutheran Church (ALC)
- 3) Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh (ELCMP)
- 4) Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States (ELCITHS)
- 5) Good Samaritan Evangelical Lutheran Church (GSELC)
- 6) Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church (GELC)
- 7) India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC)
- 8) Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC)
- 9) Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC)
- 10) South Andhra Lutheran Church (SALC)
- 11) Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC)

The history of each Church renders a different experience given the history and polity of India on the one hand and the kind of commitment of each of the Mission partners from the West had for the Propagation of the Gospel. All the Lutheran Churches in India are today federated under *United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India*, with its Headquarters in Chennai.

Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church

Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church is spread over 500 miles of fertile agricultural land along the east coast of India in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Lutheran work among Telugu speaking people began with a missionary from Pennsylvania arrived in 1842. The Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church organization developed out of the United Lutheran Church Mission, which was started at Guntur in 1842. In 1879 the Augustana synod sent its first missionary to Rajahmundry and the Lutherans in these two areas came under AELC in 1927. The missionary from Pennsylvania has organized the first Lutheran congregation in Palnad for newly baptized Christians of Gurazala. The new constitution came into force in 1944 and Rev. E. Prakasam was elected as the first Indian President of the Church. During the period of the separate Guntur and Rajahmundry Missions, the Guntur Synod was formed in 1906, and in 1920 the Rajahmundry Mission congregations were organized into a Synod. In 1927 the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church was constituted, to take over the responsibilities of the Guntur and Rajahmundry Synods. The United Lutheran Church in America gave approval in 1926 to the proposed constitution and by-laws of the new Church body, and recognized the A.E.L. Church as an associate Synod.

Arcot Lutheran Church

The first missionary of the Arcot Lutheran Church of the Danish Missionary Society (DMS) was a German Rev. C.C.E. Ochs. He started his first Mission station Bethanien at Melpattambakkam in South Arcot in 1861. Now all its activities have been transferred to the nearby town Nellikuppam. The second mission station of DMS was opened at Tirukkoyilur in 1869 by Rev. P. Andersen and was called "Siloam". Siloam church was consecrated on 10th October, 1886 and on the same day the first Indian pastors were ordained and more than 30 persons were baptized. Saron, a third mission station of DMS was opened in the year 1882 situated just outside the town Tiruvannamalai. In 1898 a mission station was built in the town, from 1905 called "Carmel". The fourth mission station in the Arcot District "Bethesda" in Kallakurichi was built in 1893 by Rev. A. Larsen. DMS started its mission stations at Panruti, Vriddhachalam, Devanampatnam, Darisanapuram, Servaroj Hills etc. In the year 1913 Church constitution was inaugurated. This church is serving Tamil speaking population in the districts of South and North Arcot, Tamil Nadu.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh, had the first batch of missionaries from Sweden in 1877 and were met by a Swedish Missionary and Lecturer at the Hislop College, Nagpur. They met the representative of the Mission Rev. J. Dawson who had started the so called "Chhindwara Gond Mission". During the language study period after some touring and correspondence they decided upon the districts of Sagar and Narsinghpur as their mission fields. In 1882 the first baptism took place. In 1883 the first fruit was gathered from Betul District. The pioneer Mr. Danielson was sent to Chhindwara as the first Swedish Missionary in this place. At the end of a ten-year work, the Society settled down in four districts - Sagar, Narsinghpur, Betul and Chhindwara. In 1891 Narsinghpur district was given up in favour of the M.E. Mission which showed great intention to open Mission work there. Since 1891 the field of this Mission has been Sagar, Betul and Chhindwara districts. In 1894 two mission stations were opened where Gondas are found in greater number. One in Kondhar, the other in Bordhai, both in Betul district. In 1897 the first fruit of Chhindwara was gathered. A well known young man was baptised with his wife. For the training of craftsmen an Industrial School was opened at Sagar where a large number of carpenters and some blacksmiths have been trained. A Seminary was started in 1889 by Rev. A.G. Danielson for training Indian co-workers. A few years after another Seminary was started for training women workers. This was done partly at Chhindwara and partly at Sagar. At that time an Anglo Vernacular Middle School for boys and a vernacular school for girls were started at Chhindwara. In 1900 a building was erected for the Seminary; it was used for the boys of Middle School also. In 1913 an important step was taken by the Indian leadership when an Indian was ordained pastor on 24th November 1912 at Sagar.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States (ELCITHS) is the new baby born in the UELCI family in November 2003. The 25th Triennial Conference at Chennai in November admitted this church to full membership within the UELCI. The new church in the family has a very unique history. The ELCITHS brings together five distinct ethnic communities together which are the Bodos, the Assamese and Oriyas in Himalayan States, Zomi tribes of North East India and the Manipuris. This enriches the life of the UELCI tremendously and is a new companion

in our Lutheran communion in India. Four different churches have come together to make the ELCITHS. They are: Bodo Evangelical Diocese, Assam Evangelical Lutheran Church, Eastern Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Christian Church, Manipur.

Good Samaritan Evangelical Lutheran Church

This Church is in the District of Kammam, Andhra Pradesh. Rev. S. Paul Raj was the founder of these Lutheran Communities. These communities were formed around 1972, and today their number is estimated to be around 50,000. They are mostly the tribal Churches of recent origin.

Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church (GELC) shortly named as the Gossner Church was established when four Missionaries erected their tents on 2nd November, 1845 at the present GELC Centre at Ranchi. Gossner Church was inaugurated with the baptism of a girl in 1846, followed by other children of Missionary and some local parents. But the mass conversion movement started after the baptism of four Oraons in 1850, the baptism of two Mundas in 1851, the baptism of nine Bangalees from Manbhum in 1855 and the baptism of two Kaharia in 1866. In this way the Church expanded in North West and South East areas of Ranchi, Bihar and the neighbouring states upto Assam in the North East. The Church declared its autonomy in 1919. Subsequently there have been several changes in the constitution from time to time. The Gossner Church has been functioning through Five Anchals, namely, Assam Anchal, Madhya Anchal, North Western Anchal, Orissa Anchal, and South Eastern Anchal and through Head Quarter Congregation, Ranchi, with a special status as per revised constitution adopted in 1960. The Gossner Church became India's first fully self-governing and property-owning protestant church.

India Evangelical Lutheran Church

The India Evangelical Lutheran Church earlier known as *Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission* began work in 1895. Indian Missionaries Naether and Mohn were accordingly called and were commissioned at St. Charles, Missouri, in 1894. They had been charged to work in the Tamil language area, since they were already acquainted with that language, but to choose a field where no other mission was operating. Accordingly, Naether settled in Krishnagiri, Salem District and Mohn in Ambur, North Arcot District. Two more missionaries who

joined this mission were placed in Bargur, 10 miles east of Krishnagiri and in Vaniyambadi, 13 miles east of Ambur. Thus the new mission started with a location of four stations. A missionary was sent to live in Nagercoil for a year and the Vadaseri congregation was taken over and now the twelve-year old mission was working in two fields. In 1911 more missionaries were sent out to these two fields. In 1911 the mission work was extended to Malayalam speaking area. The ministry was started in Vadakangulam, Tirunelveli District in 1916. The school established in Vadakangulam became the mission's second high school, the first being at Ambur and the third at Trivandrum. In 1914, the original Salem-North Arcot field began doing a little expanding on its own. Members from the various congregations had gone to Kolar Gold Fields in Mysore State to work in the mines. In 1921, a well-known Tamil author and pastor of the Leipzig Mission, and later some congregations of the South India Evangelical Lutheran Church were asked to take over the Missouri Lutheran Mission.

Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church

Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church is the only Church, which is shepherding to host of language groups - Oriya, Kuri, Godaba, Bonda, Bhotra, Didegi and Koya. The ministries that this Church include are education, health care and Social Service. The Church is the fruit of the Sehleswig - Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Society (Brekum) whose founder was Christian Jensen from North Germany. Though work was initiated in 1892, two world wars of 20th Century have impeded the progress and even turned the whole missionary work into an orphaned mission. The first Lutheran Mission working in East Jeypore was the Breklum Mission. When this mission (about 1890) founded its second Telugu station, at Parvatipuram, one of its objects was to get a strategical point from which the work could be carried out into the 2 miles distant East Jeypore. Since 1896 the Breklum Mission tried to find a suitable place for the first of these stations, and ultimately Gunupur was selected, though it is situated in the south eastern part of the land. The first baptism of a man with his family, took place in 1903 at Gunupur. In 1905 Breklum resolved to build a second station at Bissamcuttack. In 1914 there were at Bissamcuttack 16 Christians, including the families of the two evangelists. The U.L.C.M missionaries constituted themselves as an independent missionary society, "The East Jeypore Mission" in the year 1928. East Jeypore became its third field. In 1932 East Jeypore becomes the third mission field of the Danish Missionary Society. Since

then the designation of the Mission has been, The East Jeypore Mission under the Danish Missionary Society. At Gunupur 18 were baptised during the first two years (in 1930) and after ten years of work (in 1938). From the beginning of 1949 the congregations of this field have been organized into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in East Jeypore.

Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church

Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church designated itself as a Church from the time of the first baptism of the members in 1868, and thus bypassed the long period of mission status, through which most churches in Asia and Africa have gone. This is a multi-lingual Church and is located in three states of North India - Bihar, Assam and Bengal, and extended into Nepal. The headquarters of this Church is Dumka in Bihar. The membership of the church is very diversified from its origin and Skatals, one of India's aboriginal tribes, are in majority. They comprise two main groups, one west of the Ganges River, and the other in the Northeast of Assam, Boros, originally a Mongolian tribe but naturalized in Assam, comprises a second district linguistic group. The third one is Bengali group, which is scattered in numerous small congregations. A fourth group is of Hindu Garo tribe, which was the fruit of the Sweden Mission. The Church's changing name is like a theme with variations. It has borne the present name since 1958. Before that it was Ebenezer Evangelical Lutheran Church (1950 - 58); originally it was called the Indian Home Mission to the Santals expressing its founder's envisioned self-support from Indian resources. Although the first two santals were ordained as early as 1876, the Santal Theological Seminary was opened only in 1916. It is the only theological school in India giving instructions in Santali.

South Andhra Lutheran Church

South Andhra Lutheran Church is the second Lutheran Church in Andhra Pradesh. The language is Telugu. The headquarters of this Church is located at the foot of Tirupathi Venkateswara Hill at Tirupathi. The church work began by the Hermansburg Missionary Society in 1865. Later on, the responsibility of supporting the mission field was taken over by the American Lutheran Church. A plan called zonal system was introduced in the early 1970s to prepare the work for self-support. Parishes in each of the 8 zones continue to encourage each other towards that end. Sunday Schools, youth programmes, and women work are the related Ministries of this church. August Mylius was first missionary

from Hermannsburg to India and he landed in Madras on 25th February 1865. He founded the first station Sullurupeta, in 1866. In the course of the following year stations were opened at Nayudupet and at Gudur in the year 1867. In 1877 a station was opened at Tirupati in the Chittoor District. A church was built and dedicated in 1877 at Tirupati. Another station was opened at Kodur in 1881. The first school was established in Nayudupet in 1867 by Mylius. A High School was opened at Tirupati in 1880.

Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church is the descendant of Tranquebar Mission. The work began in 1706 by the Royal Danish Mission. The TELC was constituted in 1919. We spoke about the Tranquebar mission at the beginning.

Challenges and Problems Today

For lack of space we only mention a few serious issues without any elaboration.

Church without Mission?

The Churches generally react to the conditions of the political conjunctures. The Churches would argue the difficulties of conversion. It is an important concern to note that the Lutheran Churches today seem to have somehow abandoned the concept of conversion. One does not clearly understand the time span when this major shift occurred. Is a Church possible without propagating the Word to the people who do not know Christ? Some scholars have understood the deviation that the modern Evangelical Lutheran Churches have detoured, that from the lines of the New Testament Church to that of the principles developed in the Western 'Mother Churches'. When the native Churches became 'self-sufficient', there seems to be some hesitation about the need of the propagation of the Gospel.

Faced with the need not only to bring people to faith in Christ, but also to nurture them in that faith, the missionaries did not adequately teach the Christian converts the need for mission on the local congregation level. The psychological shift and spiritual strength is needed to move from a self-centred beneficiary status to a desire for responsible witness to others beyond one's own community.

The change in the efforts of the Church and therefore the commitment to the Gospel takes a back seat when other matters get the focus. The

'foreign' missionaries had the zeal, because they saw for clear the need for Christianization. The Indians do not see the circumstances warranting conversion.

Essentials and Non-essentials?

Many pastors and lay leaders have not been clear on the difference between what does not change and what must change. Often methods or structures have been assumed to be part of Christian doctrine, and hence not subject to change. Leaders have not demonstrated the scholarship and courage needed to distinguish the essential from non-essential, the central from the peripheral. As a result theology has tended to preserve tradition and structure rather than stimulate people to imaginative approaches to ministry, which reflect the liberating power of the Gospel.

Poverty and National Issues

The majority of the Lutherans still suffer from poverty. But poverty is a national issue, to be addressed by all, along with other issues like development, women's issues, communalism and religious fundamentalism. The Lutherans have two sides of engagement. One is about the Indian society, and the second about the Church itself as the society. The larger society should be the operating space of the Church.

Caste and Untouchability

The Lutheran Church from within has major preoccupation with two important concerns. One, regarding the caste, to be more specific *untouchability*, and the other in relation to the property that was invested in the name of Church. The caste question in the Church is directly a matter of power. This is a serious condition pointing towards the position of Mission in the Church. We had discussed earlier the issue of caste in the Church. The matter of property is explained in the light of Episcopal hierarchies. The theological consolidation is not happening the way it should for the Indian Church.